



**GENTLEMEN  
PREFER GHOSTS**  
MARILYN MONROE &  
HAUNTED HOLLYWOOD

PAINTINGS AND PORTALS SALVADOR DALI'S STATION REVELATION  
SECRETS OF THE PRADO ART AND THE OCCULT IN MADRID'S MUSEUM  
THE ART OF SAUCERY 50 YEARS OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL IMAGES

DANISH DICK DRAMA • SIGNAL FROM SPACE • LEIPZIG LION HUNT • ALIEN MANTIS ATTACK

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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NEWS

# Fortean Times

FT404 APRIL 2021 £4.80

## BATTERSEA POLTERGEIST

THE TERRIFYING 12-YEAR ORDEAL  
OF ONE SOUTH LONDON FAMILY

## FIELDS OF THE NEPHILIM

IN SEARCH OF FALLEN ANGELS  
AND BIBLICAL GIANTS



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**POLTERGEISTS!**  
a strange force  
in all of us?

# SPURIOUS transients

# Something STRANGE

# Came Out Of The Skies

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UFO incidents  
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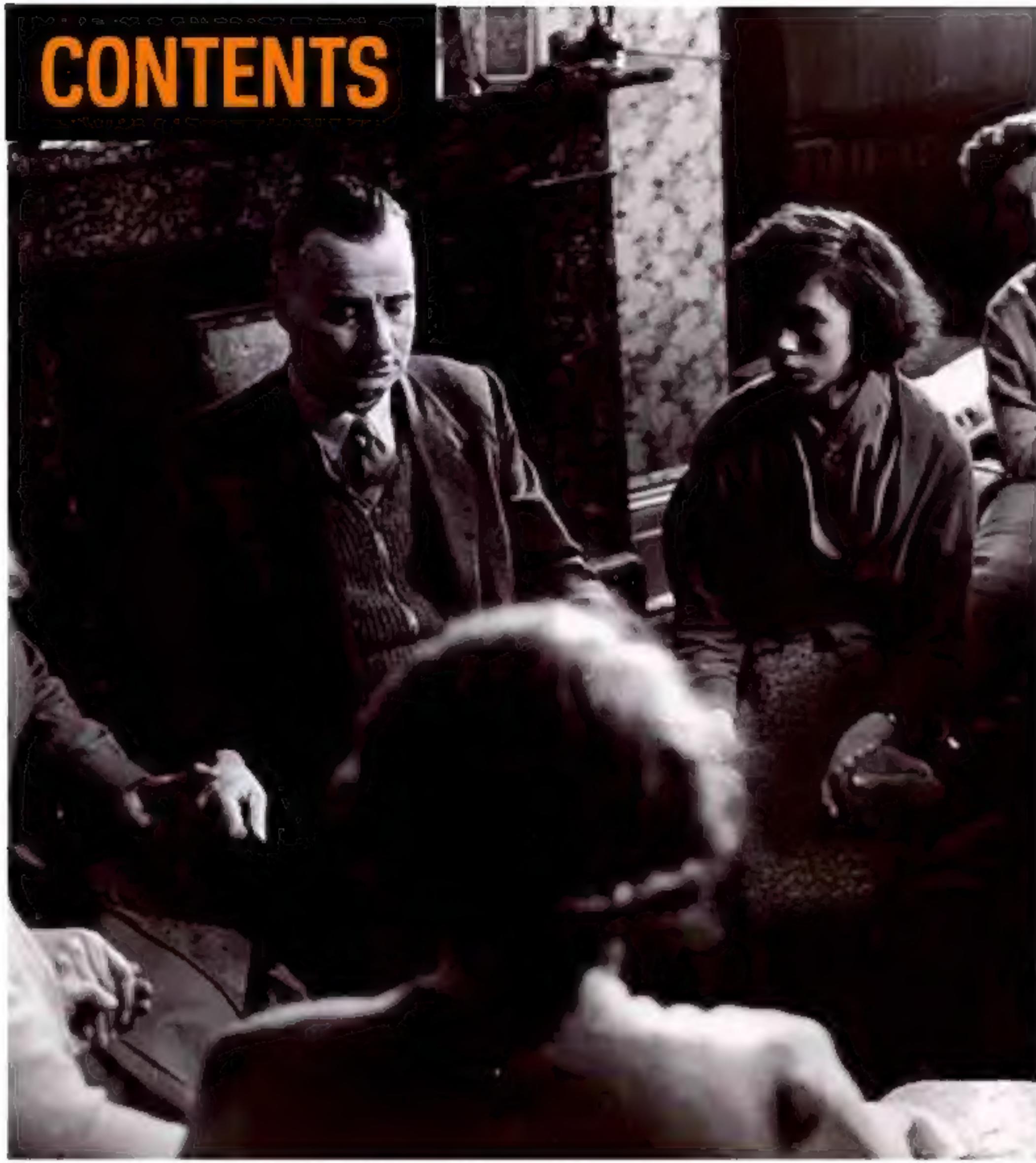
Silver  
Giants

UFOs



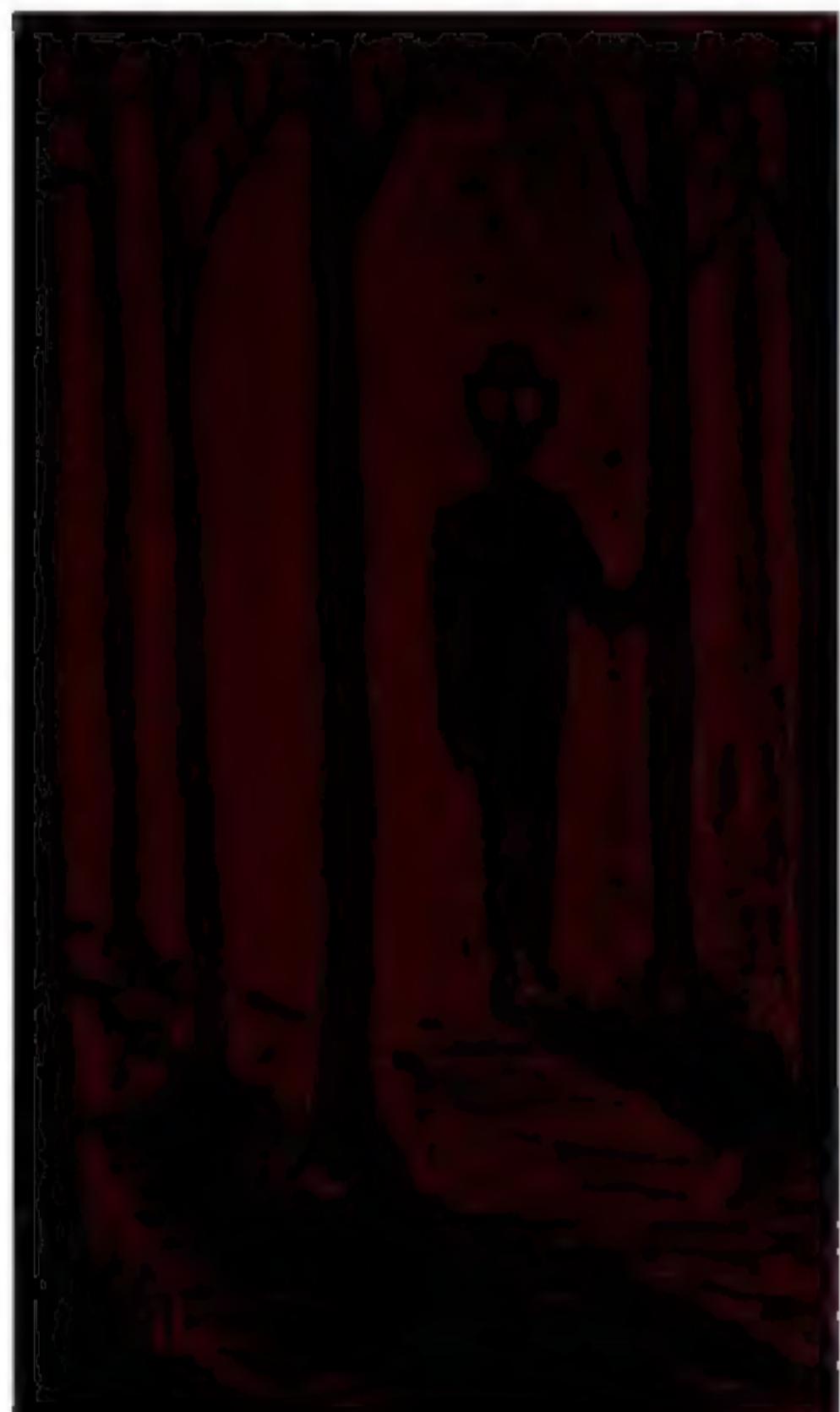
Sky blue coloured vinyl LP record available from:  
[spurioustransients.bandcamp.com](http://spurioustransients.bandcamp.com)

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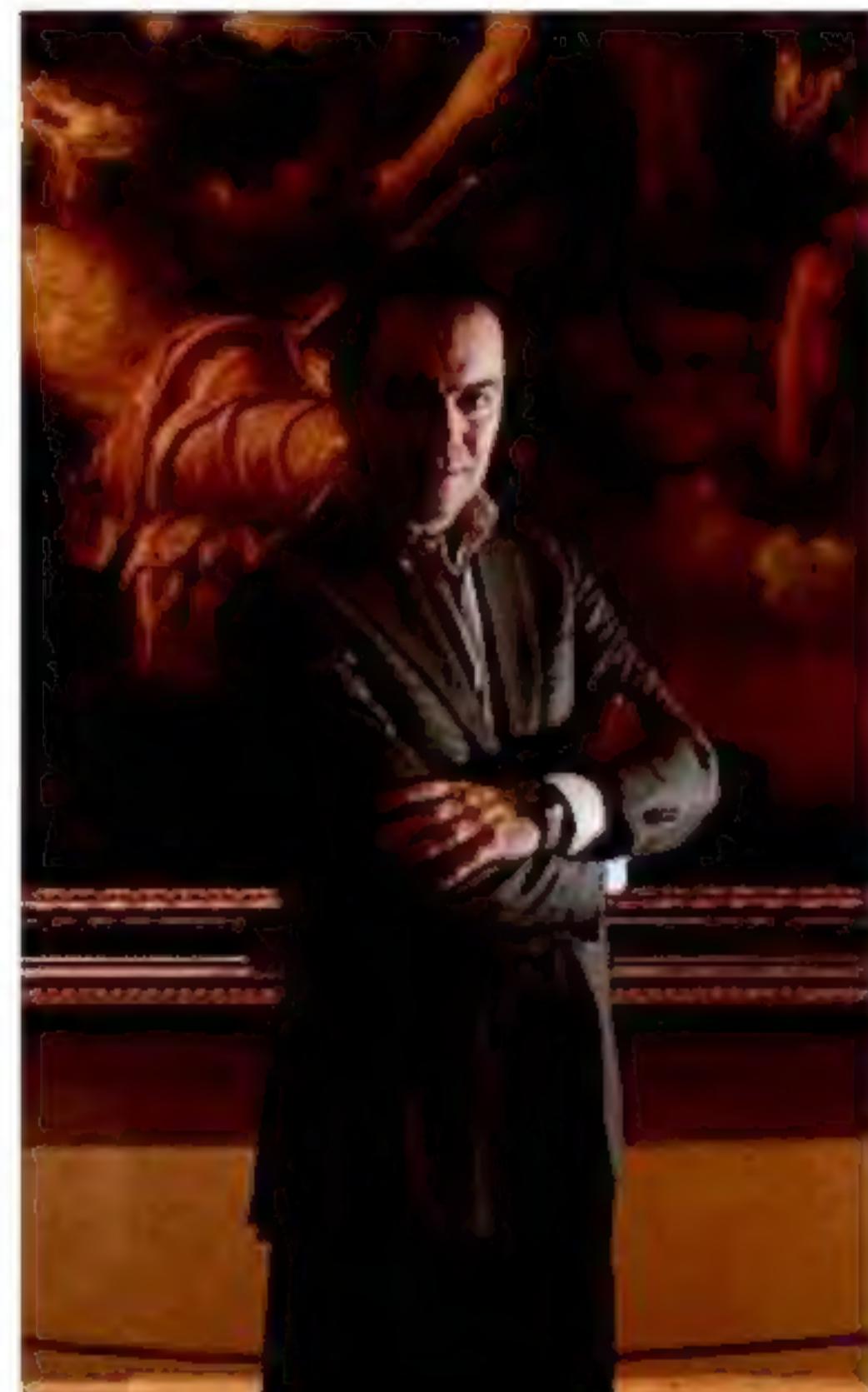
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COVER ILLUSTRATION: ETIENNE GILFILLAN

PHOTOS AND CLIPPINGS COURTESY SHIRLEY HITCHINGS

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# EDITORIAL



## POLTERGEISTS AND PORTALS

### MOVE OVER, ENFIELD

In this issue's cover story, parapsychologist Dr Ciaran O'Keeffe tackles one of the best documented, but perhaps least known, poltergeist events on record. Starting in 1956 with a steadily escalating series of fairly typical phenomena, the Battersea Poltergeist case proved unusual in a number of ways. Firstly, its duration – 12 years in all – marks it out as unique; in addition, the sheer range of phenomena on display – bangings, tappings, levitations, vanishings, apports, written messages, drawings on walls, mysterious fires and even Christmas greetings and gifts for the unfortunate family at the centre of it all – is astonishing (see the detailed timeline on pp32-36 to have your mind truly boggled). Then there are the multiple personae adopted by the polt – he started out as 'Donald', but changed into 'The Dauphin' – and the other entities that flit in and out of the story (such as the frankly rather scary 'Shaggy Roots').

Donald is quite a character; he wheedles and cajoles, issues demands and then makes threats when these are not met, taps along to the wireless, takes photographs and smokes cigarettes. While at times reminiscent of the celebrated Enfield case, what is striking about Battersea is that, here, we seem to be in the company of an arch trickster, reminiscent at times of that sometimes jolly, sometimes tormenting, 'man-weasel', Gef the talking mongoose (FT269:32-39).

It's fascinating stuff, and we make no apology for allowing Ciaran to investigate it at considerable length; we found it was impossible to even scrape the surface within the scope of a standard article. What with James Clark's excellent 2013 book on the subject, co-written with Shirley Hitchings, the then 15-year-old girl on whom the phenomena centred, and the recent BBC podcast, it appears the Battersea Poltergeist is finally receiving the reassessment it deserves.

Elsewhere, you'll find a rather different theme running through this issue: the relationship between art and strange phenomena. Clive Prince takes a tour of Madrid's Prado museum to learn about its hidden side with the city's 'occulture' expert (p38); Dean Ballinger examines Salvador Dalí's obsession with Perpignan's railway station and its cosmic portal (p56); and Jenny Randles looks back at how alien encounters have been portrayed over a 50-year period (p23).

Speaking of extraterrestrial visitors, we'd also like to welcome Nigel Watson back on board the *FT* mothership in a new regular spot. With this issue, he'll be acting as Jenny Randles's UFO Files co-pilot and bringing us 'Saucers of the Damned', a monthly round-up of ufological news, sightings and strangeness.

### NEW IMPROVED READER SURVEY

Our thanks to the hundreds of people who have responded to the *FT* reader survey launched last issue. Our initial effort was a Heath Robinson affair not notable for its user-friendliness, but due to the efforts of Stu Neville, you'll now find a far better experience on our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/ForTeanTimes](http://www.facebook.com/ForTeanTimes). We're keeping the survey open for a few more weeks, so do participate if you haven't already – hearing what you've got to say about *FT* is a big help for us in planning for the future.

### GETTING COPIES OF FT

Despite current lockdown restrictions, you should be able to buy *FT* from your usual stockist. If you are experiencing difficulties, or cannot go out, then copies for home delivery, including issues you may have missed, can be ordered here: <https://magsdirect.co.uk/magazine-category/entertainment/fortean/>. Taking out a subscription is, of course, the best way to guarantee your regular *FT* fix – turn to p58 for the latest offers.

### ERRATA

FT399:17: Andy Asp, of Oakland, California, wrote in with a correction to this issue's 'Ghostwatch' column: "Alan Murdie writes that Jurgenson recorded what he believed were voices of 'Hitler, Goering and the US murderer Caryl Chessman, executed in 1960'. Chessman was never tried or convicted of murder, but was executed for a brief crime spree in January 1948, which included robbery, kidnapping and rape; he was one of the last executions in the US for non-lethal crimes under the 'Little Lindbergh' law, which was repealed prior to his execution but was in effect at the times the crimes were committed."

FT399:72: In Owen Whiteoak's letter 'Fanzine History', Rob Hansen's 2016 book should have been given as *THEN – Science Fiction Fandom in the UK 1930-1980* (not 'Science Fiction Fandom', which we are pretty sure is not a thing).

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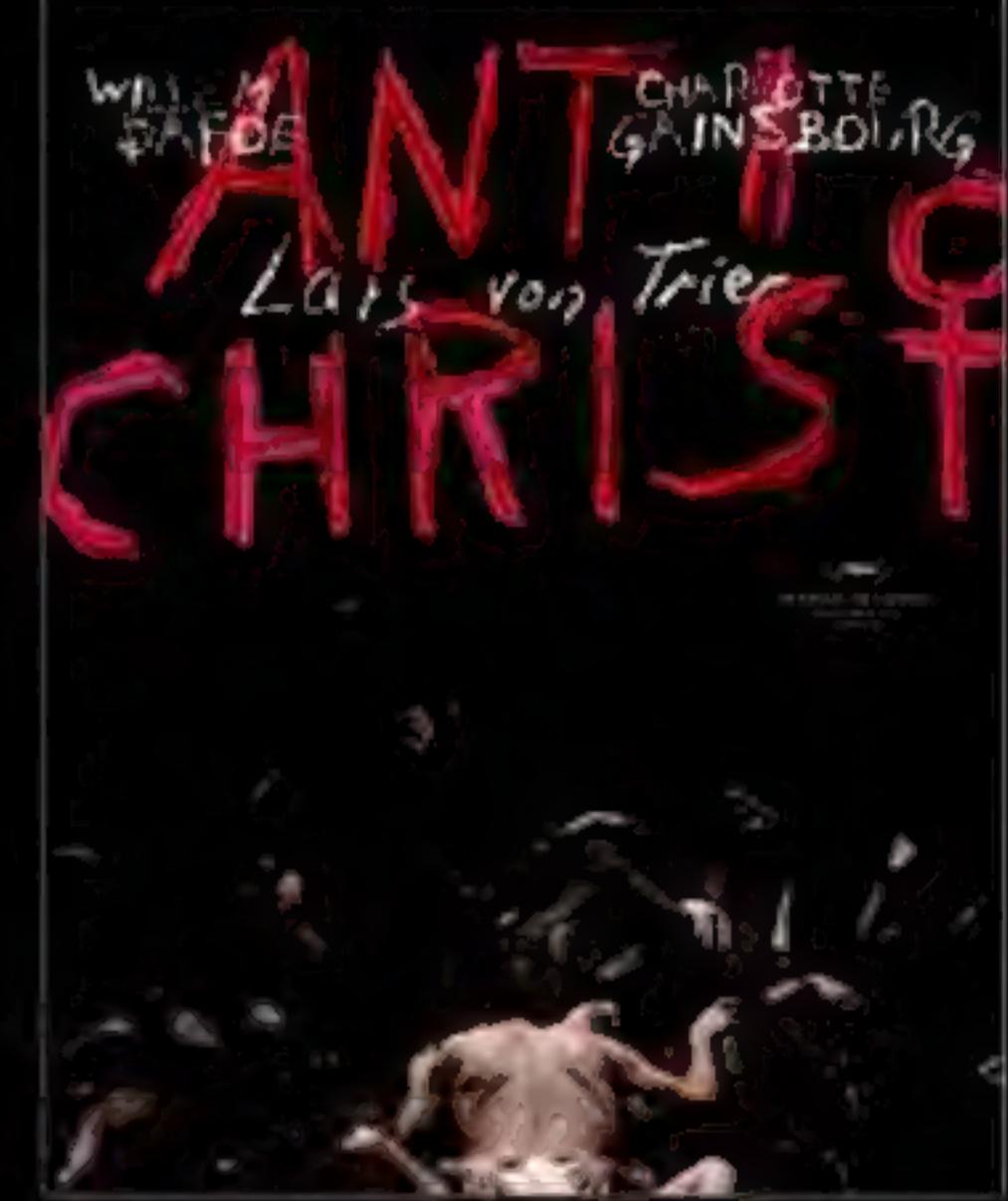
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## A MINIATURE MYSTERY

### Why did the “tiny humanoid-shaped figure” cross the road?

A woman out walking her dog in St Helens, Lancashire, claims to have made an amazing discovery after returning home and examining the photos she'd taken with her new smartphone. One appeared to show a tiny humanoid seemingly crossing a disused road covered in fallen leaves and about to pass over some double-yellow lines in front of a lamp-post and heading towards park railings on the left.

The photographer, local woman Mellissa Braham, recalled: “It was my birthday recently and as a gift I received a new smart phone. On Friday, February 26, seeing as it was a nice day I decided to take my dog for a walk in the afternoon. I also took my new phone to test out the camera. During the afternoon I took several short video clips and a selection of random photographs at different resolutions. Later on in the evening I uploaded the photography to my PC to have a look at it. It was whilst looking through the still photos that I spotted on one of them what appears to look like a tiny humanoid-shaped figure walking from right to left. Now I am not saying that the object is a tiny living and breathing being of some kind, but looking at the enlargements of the object one can clearly see what does resemble a bipedal creature of some kind: a head, eye, body, arms, legs, hands and feet can clearly be seen. Whatever the mysterious object is... it is reflecting sunlight and also casts a shadow on the ground...”

Ms Braham says the photo was taken at full resolution with a 12MP camera set to fully



ABOVE: Ms Braham's photo and an enlargement of the tiny humanoid figure.

automatic, and with no zoom. The weather was dry, mild and sunny, and the picture was taken at 4.05pm. The location is Balker Drive, between Victoria Park and a demolished healthcare centre. Mill Street Barracks, claimed by some to be among the most haunted places in the UK, is less than half a mile away. She admits the strange figure could well be “something very ordinary like a scrap of rubbish captured at a strange angle” or a trick of the light, and acknowledges she is not a photographic expert.

Ms Braham's curious image – together with her account of how and when she took the photo – has been uploaded and shared

to several popular paranormal mysteries websites, where she has been mocked, ridiculed, and accused of fakery. The figure certainly has a distinctly two-dimensional quality, and lacks detail, despite the high-quality phone camera. Since the weather was bright and sunny that day, one of the more sympathetic online commentators pointed out that with bright sunlight falling on the object or entity, one would not expect details to be visible. This commentator suggested that its two-dimensional appearance may have resulted from a combination of the distance, the size of the figure, and the sunlight all over it.

Ms Braham, who told a local newspaper she intends to ask photographic experts to analyse the image, reiterated that she hadn't seen the figure at the time she took the photo. “If someone left it planted there for a joke, a model, toy or cardboard cut-out,” she argued, “then why didn't I see it, and surely some eagle-eyed little kid would have spotted it and kept it for themselves?” Although several critics have suggested the figure is a paper cut-out, Ms Braham assured the newspaper that while it hadn't been a windy day, there was a breeze sufficiently strong to send a lightweight paper figure flying away. Besides which, she concluded: “Who can get a piece of paper much less than a millimetre thick to stand upright on a breezy day on its own with no visible means of suspension?”

Although some have suggested the photo was deliberately faked for financial gain, it was sent to *FT* by Ms Braham with the words: “Please feel free to publish my story, I ask for nothing in return, I just thought it was interesting and worth sharing.”

Comparisons have been made with the famous Cottingley Fairies photos (FT356:30-35), and with a picture taken in Argentina in 2008 allegedly showing a sinister gnome (FT235:4-5). Both cases were subsequently revealed to have been hoaxes. This latest image does, however, highlight a wider issue. It is estimated that 3.8 billion people worldwide currently own a smartphone – 48 per cent of the global population – yet despite many of these phones being equipped with high-quality cameras, there has not been a significant increase in photographic evidence for anomalous entities. *wigantoday.net*, 8 Mar 2021.



## DANISH DICK DRAMA

The prehensile penis of John Dillerman

PAGE 10



## SIGNAL FROM SPACE

A message from Proxima Centauri?

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## MOSAIC MYSTERY

South American macaw seen in Ancient Rome?

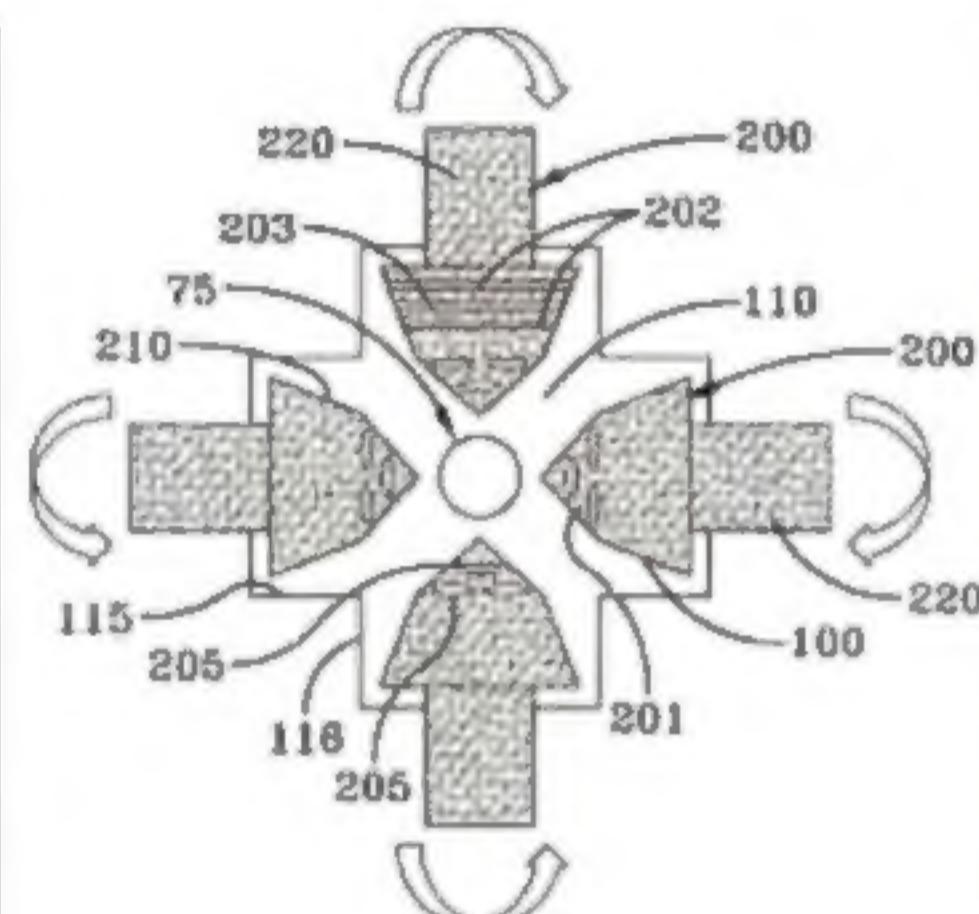
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# NAVY'S 'SCIENCE FICTION' PATENTS

Is the technological research of Dr Salvatore Cezar Pais gibberish or genius?

Patents filed by the US Navy tell of mysterious and outlandish-sounding technological research. Areas of investigation include work on a compact fusion reactor that could power cities, an engine that works using "inertial mass reduction", and a "hybrid aerospace-underwater craft". It is reported that the Navy has had to construct prototypes for some of these strange devices in order to prove that they work.

The man behind the patents is said to be one Dr Salvatore Cezar Pais, who has worked for a number of different Navy departments, including the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAVAIR/NAWCAD) and the Strategic Systems Programs, the latter being responsible for developing the technology behind the submarine-launched Trident class nuclear missiles. The various patents have one thing in common; at their core, the so-called 'Pais Effect', or "controlled motion of electrically charged matter via accelerated vibration and/or accelerated spin subjected to smooth yet rapid acceleration transients, in order to generate extremely high energy/high intensity electromagnetic fields". More simply put, properly spun electromagnetic fields may generate a fusion reaction, which, Pais has claimed, will revolutionise power consumption. The theory is that a functioning fusion reactor would lead to cheap and ubiquitous energy. One of the Navy patents states that this propulsion system and fusion drive could be used for a "hybrid aerospace-underwater craft", able to travel on land, sea, and in outer space at incredible speeds. Other patents include a "high temperature superconductor", an "electromagnetic field generator" and a "high frequency gravitational wave generator".



Because they sound like science fiction, these patents have generated scepticism, not least from within the Navy itself. Pais's inventions and his patents were subject to a lengthy internal review at NAVAIR. However, the resulting report found that some of the technology is "operable", and this will presumably have been because prototype demonstrations had satisfied Naval inspectors.

The physics behind Pais's claims are said to be highly complex and beyond the understanding of lay people, but a paper on his compaction fusion reactor was accepted by the peer-reviewed *Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Transactions on Plasma Science* (and published in its November 2019 issue). Pais claims this as vindication in an email to a science reporter: "The fact that my work on the design of a Compact Fusion Reactor was accepted for publication in such a prestigious journal... should speak volumes as to its importance and credibility – and should eliminate (or at least alleviate) all misconceptions... [anyone] may have in regard to the veracity (or possibility) of

LEFT: Drawing from Dr Pais's patent application for a "plasma compression fusion device".

my advanced physics concepts."

His email continued: "Do realise that my work culminates in the enablement of the Pais Effect (original physical concept). Such high energy [electromagnetic] radiation can locally interact with the Vacuum Energy State (VES) – the VES being the Fifth State of Matter (Fifth Essence – Quintessence), in other words the fundamental structure (foundational framework), from which Everything else (Spacetime included) in our Quantum Reality, emerges. The Engineering of the Pais Effect can give rise to the Enablement of Macroscopic Quantum Coherence, which if you have closely been following my work, you understand the importance of."

It has been pointed out that this sounds like gibberish, and one possibility is that the entire story is a propaganda hoax akin to claims that remote viewing and telepathy were weaponised by both the US and Soviet militaries during the Cold War. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that the Pentagon has a history of the successful development of cutting-edge technology. Over 100 years ago, nuclear weapons were science fiction. GPS, the TOR network, and, indeed, the Internet itself all began life as Pentagon programs. So perhaps these Navy patents will lead to revolutionary changes in energy and transportation in the future. *vice.com*, 3 Feb 2021.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**SPANISH PORN STAR HELD BY POLICE AFTER MAN DIES AT HIS HOUSE FROM INHALING POISONOUS TOAD FUMES**

*Telegraph.co.uk*, 4 June 2020.

**Dead man fired at armed police, inquest jury told**

*Western Daily Press*, 3 Mar 2020

**GWYNETH PALTROW'S 'VAGINA' CANDLE REPORTEDLY EXPLODES IN UK WOMAN'S HOME**

*New York Post*, 18 Jan 2021.

**Tractor-hating eagle goes on two-day 'flight of fancy'**

*BBC News*, 19 Aug 2020.

**NAKED MOLE-RATS ARE 'EXTREME XENOPHOBES'**

*D.Telegraph*, 29 Jan 2021.



## SIDELINES...

### OWL RESCUE

An eagle owl trapped in a well at a ruined castle in northern Germany was rescued after a local resident heard distressed hooting noises. After failing to lure the owl into a sack with bait, rescuers abseiled down the 40m- (131ft) deep well, as the Bad Segeberg fire service pumped oxygen into the shaft. The young owl is now in safe care at a local bat sanctuary. *BBC News*, 27 July 2020.

### LONG COVID

Suzy Klein, BBC Radio 3 Essential Classics presenter, says she is making mistakes because long Covid left her with "brain fog". "Carmen's 'zesty gipsies' became 'chesty zipsies'. Tchaikovsky came out sounding more like 'Shostakovsky'". *D. Telegraph*, 26 Jan 2021.

### TAKEOUT'S BUM DEAL

A takeaway restaurant was ridiculed after a punctuation error left it named "Anus Kitchen" on flyers. The leaflets were to advertise Anu's Indian restaurant in Dulwich, south London. *Sun*, 20 Nov 2020.

### JUGGLING WITH DEATH

A fatal police shooting of a popular street juggler led to the destruction of several public buildings in the southern Chilean city of Panguipulli, where angry rioters burned down a municipal government building, the post office, the civil registry, a local court, a water management company and others. The shooting occurred after the entertainer allegedly refused to provide identification to a police officer as he performed at a busy city intersection. The destruction left the city of 34,000 people practically without public services. *nytimes.com*, 6 Feb 2021.



## COVID CORNER

The WHO provides China with a PR coup, while Dorset Knob throwers are cancelled



GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: WHO investigators were taken to this exhibition in Wuhan celebrating the city's fight against the coronavirus.

### WHO INVESTIGATORS BACK BEIJING

The Chinese government's insistence that the SARS-CoV-2 virus (that causes the Covid-19 group of illnesses) didn't originate from Wuhan's Institute of Virology laboratory has received backing from the World Health Organisation (WHO), whose investigative team have concluded their fact-finding mission, calling for "no further study into that theory", despite some evidence from US and other intelligence agencies to the contrary.

At the outset of their mission, the WHO team were criticised when it was announced that the Wuhan lab was to be off-limits. In fact, the investigators, who stayed in China for one month, were permitted to examine the Institute of Virology – for a period of under four hours. They reported meeting with Chinese scientists there, including Shi Zhengli, one of China's leading experts on bat coronaviruses and deputy director of the Wuhan lab. It is not clear whether the WHO team were able to inspect the lab's security measures to prevent accidental leakage and contamination. During their closely monitored visit to China, reporters were

largely kept at arms' length from the WHO experts, but snippets of their findings have emerged on Twitter and via interviews given by individuals. During their one-month stay, two weeks were spent in quarantine and another two on fieldwork. They are reported to have spent several days inside their Wuhan hotel, receiving visits from Chinese officials but without venturing out into the city itself. Critics have also questioned the purpose of the team's visit to a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic.

The group spent just one hour at the Wuhan seafood market where many of the first clusters of infections emerged, and which has been suggested as the source of the virus, it being posited that SARS-CoV-2 originated in bats and either jumped directly to humans due to the unsanitary conditions at the 'wet market' (with live as well as dead animals) or passed to humans via an intermediary creature such as the pangolin. But Beijing is now questioning that theory too, claiming that the virus may have been imported into the country from overseas, and then spread via frozen meat on sale at the Wuhan market. Chinese scientists have pointed to studies

which, they claim, demonstrate the virus "can be carried long-distance on cold chain products".

In addition to its conclusion that it was "extremely unlikely" the virus had leaked from the lab, the WHO is now calling for studies to examine whether SARS-CoV-2 was an import to China from elsewhere. Dr Peter Embarek, the WHO team's leader, backed Chinese government assertions of there being no evidence of transmission "in Wuhan or elsewhere" in China before December 2019, although there is mounting evidence for the virus circulating globally months before that date. Dr Embarek admitted that his team had failed to establish where the virus came from, or how it had first jumped to humans.

The WHO's findings will be regarded as a PR coup for Beijing, which has continued to advance theories that lay the blame for the pandemic elsewhere than China. But its report will also be used by its critics, who feared their investigation would be used to legitimise a whitewash by Beijing; there is strong evidence for a media shutdown of news of the pandemic in China, and of whistleblowers being silenced. *D. Mail*, 9 Feb 2021.

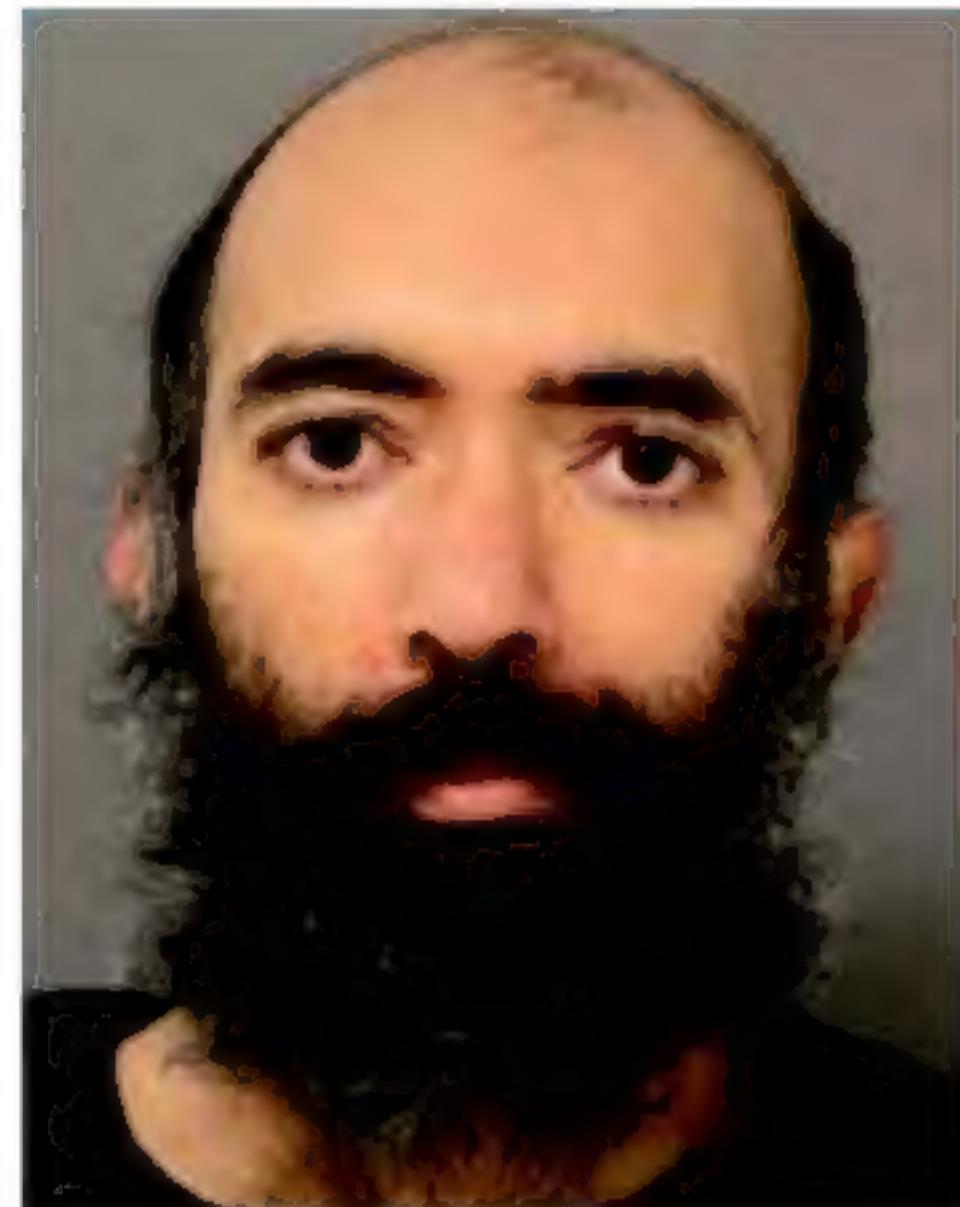


## KNOBS OUT

A local tradition of tossing knobs in a field has been cancelled this year due to coronavirus. The Dorset Knob Throwing and Frome Valley Food Festival features a competition to see who can hurl the county's traditional savoury biscuits the furthest. Experienced knobbers toss their knobs underarm while keeping one foot on the ground. The one-day event, rescheduled for May 2022, attracted 8,000 visitors in 2019. It includes live music, and knob-based games such as knob-and-spoon racing, splat the knob, knob darts, and pin the knob on the Cerne Abbas giant. Contestants also compete to see who can eat the most knobs in record time. *BBC News, 22 January 2021.*

## CHICAGO COVID BLUES

A Californian man was charged with felony criminal trespass in a restricted area of an airport in January 2021 after he was found hiding in a secure area at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. He had been living there for three months. Aditya Singh, 36, told police that the coronavirus pandemic left him too afraid to fly. He was spotted by two United Airlines employees who asked him for identification. Singh showed them a badge that actually belonged to an airport operations manager who had reported it missing in late October. He does not have a criminal record and it was unclear why the unemployed man had left the West Coast and



came to Chicago. When arrested, Singh told police he was "scared to go home due to Covid," and said other passengers at the airport had been giving him food. *apnews.com, 18 Jan 2021.*

## TOM THUMB REDUX

Liverpudlian Liam Thorp, 32, was offered a Covid vaccine despite having no medical vulnerability to the virus, because his GP surgery had recorded him as being 6.2cm tall. When combined with his weight, this miniature stature gave him an astonishing body mass index (BMI) of 28,000 – roughly 1,000 times higher than the UK average. Mr Thorp, whose real height is 6ft 2in (188cm) said he was left feeling "really confused", as he was under the impression that Covid vaccination invitations should be accepted. He later felt "uneasy" about the situation, with so many vulnerable people still unvaccinated, and so phoned his GP to query the vaccine offer. He was initially told he had been prioritised due to his obesity.

Although "on the chunky side", said Mr Thorp, "I wouldn't have thought of myself as clinically obese (even after lockdown)."

Before the mix-up was straightened out, Mr Thorp shared his "frankly surreal" experience on Twitter, where it went viral. One comment read: "Should they not have been in touch before to see how the man the size of a thumb was getting on?" And a palliative care doctor remarked: "This, for me, is the single best tweet of the entire pandemic. And may I please commend your decency in not exploiting your remarkable BMI to jump the queue?" *Guardian, 18 Feb 2021.*

## HOMEOPATHIC ANTI-VAXXERS

The Society of Homeopaths (SoH) has lost its government-approved accreditation after the Professional Standards Association learned that SoH members had been promoting anti-vaccine theories on social media platforms, subsequently reposted by the SoH's head of standards, Sue Pilkington. NHS-funded homeopathic remedies were being provided at the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital up until 2018. Established in 1849, it joined the NHS as a teaching hospital in 1948, and was renamed the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine in 2020. It continues to offer NHS-funded complementary and alternative medicine treatments, but not homeopathy. *D. Telegraph, 12 Jan 2021.*

## SIDELINES...

### INVENTIVE STALKER

Florian Buta, 50, from Swansea, harassed his ex-girlfriend by sending her photos of receipts from her dustbin, covering her front door in masking tape, and leaving a cabbage on her doorstep. *Sun, 24 Dec 2020.*

### WALNUT WARMER

An 85-year-old man set his flat alight in Aletshausen near Munich while warming walnuts with a hairdryer, which set fire to a shelf when the dryer overheated. It took 65 firefighters to tackle the blaze. *Sun, 26 Oct 2020.*

### SEA COW CRIME

US wildlife authorities launched an investigation after a manatee was spotted in Florida's Homosassa River with the word 'Trump' carved on its back. Fortunately, the marine mammal does not appear to be seriously injured, as the president's surname was scraped onto algae growing on its skin rather than into its flesh. Nevertheless, video footage of the West Indian manatee caused a public outcry. Nicknamed 'sea cows', manatees are protected under US law. *BBC News, 12 Jan 2021.*

### DEVILISH ACT

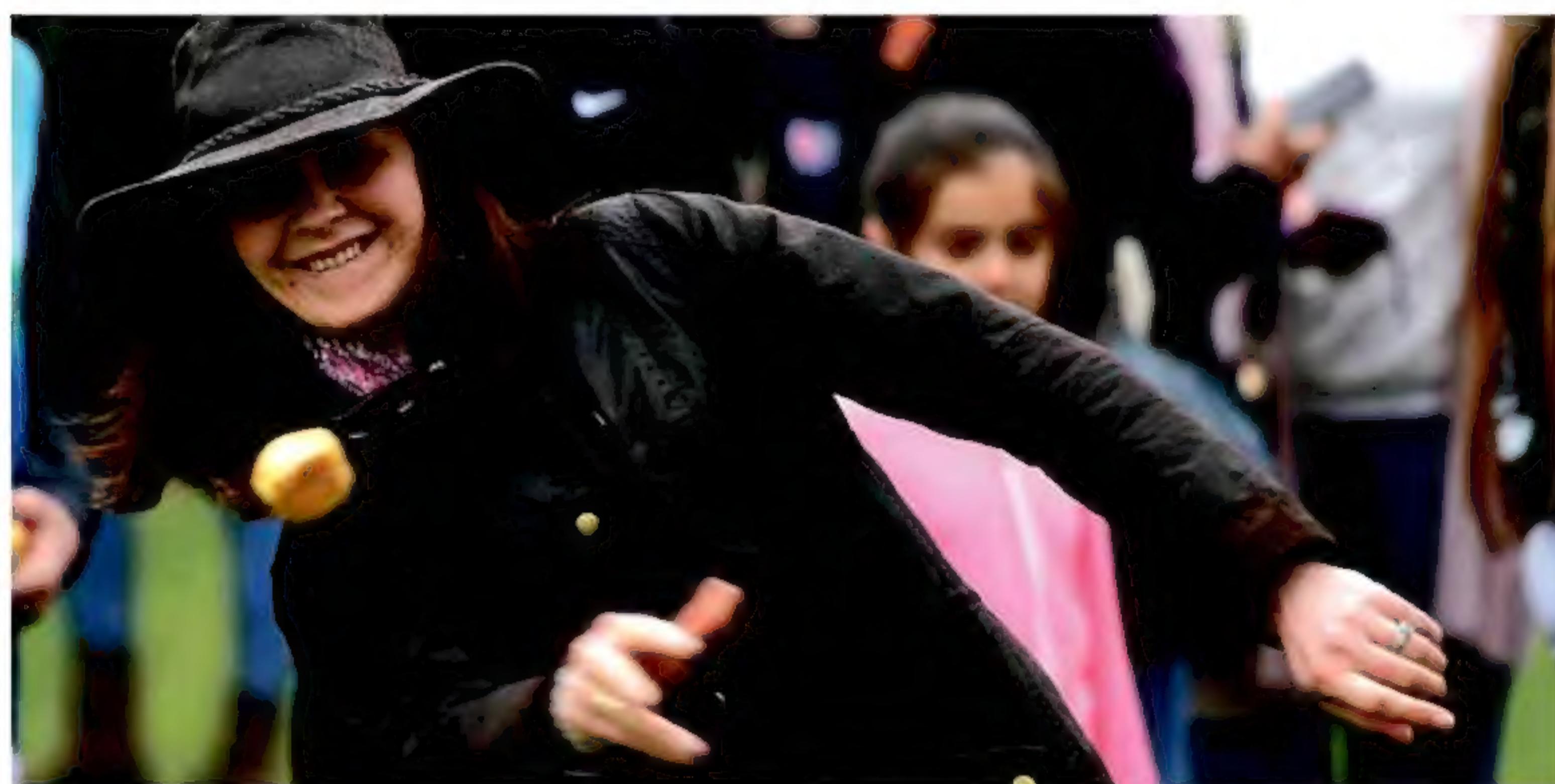
A man sprayed graffiti in red paint on a Bristol WWI memorial to advertise his friend's skateboard shop. Lucifer Black, 36, [sic] was fined £25 for vandalism and cannabis possession. *D. Telegraph, 28 Jan 2021.*

### TAP DANCING FORBIDDEN

Adam Tiano, 30, a property manager from Tottenham, north London, says his extreme phobia of people jiggling their feet is ruining his life. He can't watch football, avoids public transport and has rearranged his office so a foot-tapping colleague is out of sight. *Sun, 24 Dec 2020.*

### ROYAL DIVERSION

The Duke of Edinburgh, 99, has spent decades building up a large library on ufology, an interest kindled by his uncle, Lord Mountbatten (who wrote an official report about an alien landing on his estate). The Duke spent last summer reading *The Halt Perspective* (2016), about the Rendlesham Forest incident. *Sun, 25 Nov 2020.*



TOP: Aditya Singh lived in an airport for three months. ABOVE: Dorset's Knob tossers will now have to wait until 2022.



# STRANGE DAYS

## SIDELINES...

### LOTTO LUCK

Idaho resident Orlene Peterson won \$300,000 in the state lottery – and the very next day, snagged a \$200,000 prize in the same contest. The odds of winning these amounts on two successive days are estimated at 1 in 282.5 million. [edition.cnn.com](http://edition.cnn.com), 8 Feb 2021.

### SLEIGHING THE DEAD

Site managers at the former Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald, now a memorial to the 56,000 inmates who were killed there, have criticised visitors for taking sledge rides over mass graves. "Cases of winter sports near mass graves, disturbing the peace of the dead, will be reported," the Buchenwald website warned. "Because of the pandemic, winter sports facilities are closed in the Thuringia region, so they are using the memorial," explained historian Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau. "Unfortunately more and more people have been disrespecting the place, horse-riding or riding motorbikes." [BBC News](http://BBC News), 15 Jan 2021.

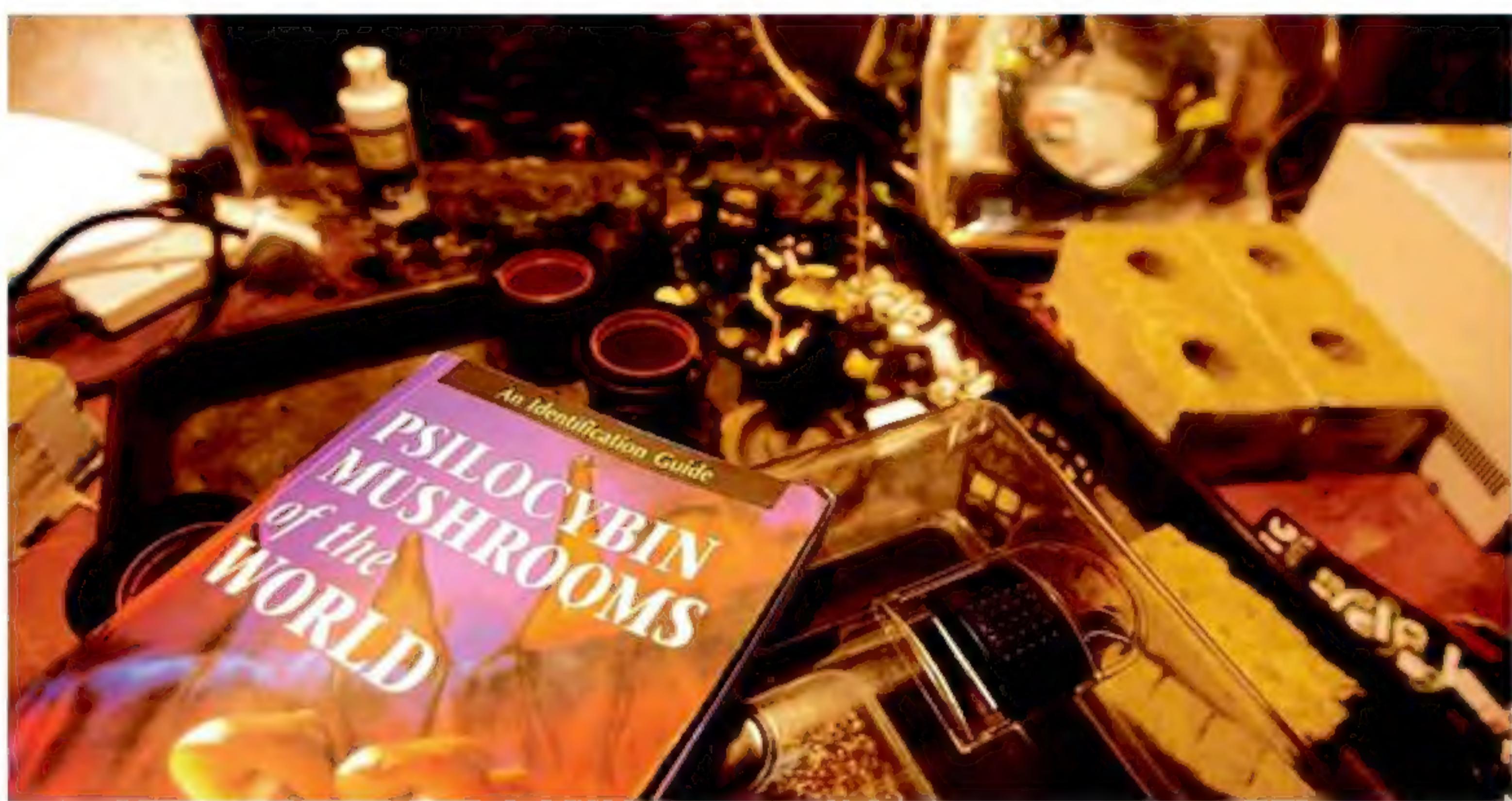
### RELEASE THE BEARS

A Kurdish animal rights charity organised a ceremony to celebrate the release of six Syrian brown bears into the wild. The animals, once captives in peoples' homes, were taken in cages to the mountainous Gara region of northern Iraq where they were to be given their freedom. Unfortunately, the panicked ursines turned and charged at a crowd of terrified spectators, forcing people to run for their lives. The bears eventually lumbered off into the snowy landscape of Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. It is not known whether anyone was injured. [news.com.au](http://news.com.au), 13 Feb 2021.



## MEDICAL BAG

Mushroom malady, Indian illness, lurcher's limp, and the man with a penis on his arm



DANIEL BERENJUAK / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: While hallucinogens can have therapeutic effects, injecting yourself with magic mushroom tea is not a very good idea.

### INTRAVENOUS SHROOMS

A man who brewed a magic mushroom tea and injected it into his veins was rushed to hospital several days later where he spent over three weeks, including eight days in an intensive care unit being treated for multisystem organ failure. After injecting himself, the man experienced lethargy and nausea with his skin turning yellow. He soon developed diarrhoea and began to vomit blood. His family took him to the hospital's emergency room, where doctors observed that he seemed very confused and was unable to participate in a meaningful interview.

He was transferred to the ICU after several organs, including his liver and kidneys, began to fail. His blood tested positive for *Brevibacillus* bacterial infection and *Psilocybe cubensis* fungal infection: the magic mushrooms were growing in his bloodstream. In addition to antibiotic and antifungal drug treatment, the man had to be placed on a ventilator after suffering acute respiratory failure. After 22 days he was discharged, but is still being treated with a long-term regimen of antibiotics and antifungals.

The 30-year-old had apparently injected the shrooms into his bloodstream hoping to find relief from bipolar disorder and opioid

dependence. Family members noted that he had recently stopped taking his bipolar medication and was "cycling between depressive and manic states". He had read reports online about the potentially beneficial effects of LSD and psilocybin mushrooms for long-term depression, anxiety and substance abuse. [livescience.com](http://livescience.com), 14 Jan 2021.

### HE CAN REBUILD YOU

Professor David Ralph of University College London Hospital, the so-called 'penis master', came to the rescue of Malcolm MacDonald, 45, who suffered a severe blood infection that turned his fingers, toes and penis black, the latter eventually falling off. However, Prof Ralph was able to construct a new penis on Mr MacDonald's arm, with an extra 2 inches (5cm) thrown in.

"I had struggled for years with an infection in my perineum but I had no idea what could happen," said the mechanic from Thetford, Norfolk. "When I saw my penis go black I was beside myself. It was like a horror film. I was in a complete panic. I knew deep down I was going to lose it."

Mr MacDonald was "completely gutted" when his penis "just dropped off onto the floor" in 2014, although fortunately his testicles remained intact. "Because I had

been through the devastation of knowing I was going to lose it, I just picked it up and put it in the bin. I went to the hospital and they said the best they could do for me was to roll the remaining stump up like a little sausage roll. It was heartbreaking."

Unsurprisingly, he became a recluse and began drinking heavily. "For two years after losing my penis, I felt a shadow of a man. My life really fell apart because I had no self-confidence. I drank too much. I didn't see family and friends – I just didn't want to have to face up to it."

But his fortunes were turned around when his local doctor told him about Prof Ralph, the phallus expert who famously created a 'bionic penis' for a patient who was born without one. Prof Ralph's proposal was to perform an arm-graft procedure, which, although it could take up to two years, would be funded by the NHS because it would eventually allow Mr MacDonald to urinate properly as well as have sexual intercourse.

"It was all my Christmases at once. I was so emotional because it was a chance at a new start," he said. "I wasn't worried about the procedure because I had seen what Prof Ralph and his team could do... they were miracle workers."

"Not having a penis felt awful," said Mr MacDonald.



ABOVE LEFT: Hospitals in Andhra Pradesh had to deal with a mystery illness. ABOVE RIGHT: Russell Jones and his limping lurcher.

It's most men's worst fear. For me I was never worried about sex, because I already had two children. It was always more about my self-confidence and simple things like using the loo."

He also decided to request an extra two inches (5cm): "They were happy to listen to what I wanted it to be like, which was amazing. Not many can say they have a designer penis."

In 2016, Prof Ralph's team of surgeons formed a new penis, with its own blood vessels and nerves, using a skin flap on the left arm of right-handed Mr MacDonald. They created a urethra and installed two tubes inflated with a hand pump, allowing him to have an erection. This shaft was then removed from his forearm, leaving the base, and allowing it to form naturally as skin and tissue. He is now waiting for the final stage of the procedure when it will be transferred to its proper location.

"When I saw it on my arm for the first time, I was so, so proud. After everything I had been through, it didn't feel weird at all, it was just a part of me," said the happy mechanic. "I just couldn't leave it alone to begin with. I thought it was the best thing ever." Indeed, he took to it so much, that he gave it a nickname: 'Jimmy'. "That they can make me a new penis at all is incredible, but that they can build it on my arm is mind-blowing," he added. "It looks like something out of a weird sci-fi comic." Despite wearing long-sleeve shirts to hide his bulge, people sometimes spot the misplaced member. "Of course, people make jokes. But I get it. It's not every day you see a man with a penis on his arm."

Unfortunately, the new penis

has still not been attached, four years after the procedure, due to a series of missed appointments, scheduling problems, staff shortages, and the coronavirus pandemic. But despite all the cancellations, Mr MacDonald remains optimistic that it will eventually be transplanted. "I am determined this penis will be ultimately used for what it was built for," he said. *nypost.com*, 31 July 2020.

#### INDIAN MYSTERY ILLNESS

Hundreds have been admitted to hospital in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh after an unidentified illness caused a wide range of symptoms including headaches, nausea, seizures, unconsciousness and other neurological symptoms. At the time of writing there have been over 600 cases and at least seven deaths. The first case was seen on 5 December 2020, with steadily increasing numbers of people presenting with symptoms over the next few days until 12 December, after which time no new cases were reported. Coronavirus had been ruled out as the cause of the illness, despite Andhra Pradesh being one of India's worst-affected states.

"The people who fell sick, especially the children, suddenly started vomiting after complaining of burning eyes. Some of them fainted or suffered bouts of seizures," said a medical officer at Eluru Government Hospital. The state's health minister, Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, said patients' blood samples had not revealed any evidence of a viral infection. "We ruled out water contamination or air pollution as the cause after



officials visited the areas where people fell sick," he said. "It is some mystery illness and only lab analysis will reveal what it is."

However, the opposition Telugu Desam Party has called for an enquiry, insisting contamination to be the cause. A preliminary investigation conducted by an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) team found lead and nickel particulate matter in patients' blood samples, as well as high heavy metal content in milk. The Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) also ran tests on the local water supply and found traces of mercury higher than permitted levels.

On 16 December, the Andhra Pradesh government concluded that pesticide residue in the water was the "main reason" for the illness, based on the AIIMS and NEERI findings. The 1984 Bhopal disaster in Madhya Pradesh, when toxic gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide plant, caused thousands of deaths. *BBC News*, 7 Dec; *CNN*, Dec 9; *Hindustan Times*, 16 Dec 2020.

#### MYSTERY OF THE LIMPING LURCHER

A London man paid a vet around £300 to have his dog, Billy, examined, as the lurcher was walking with a limp. X-rays of Billy's front leg were taken, but the vet was unable to find any injury. Owner Russell Jones said he first noticed the dog had been walking with a front paw raised after he, Russell, had broken his ankle. The vet concluded that Billy was imitating Russell, copying the way he had been walking with a limp since his injury. *[UPI]* 19 Jan 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### BROCK VANDALS

Graves in Yardley Cemetery near Birmingham are in imminent danger of collapse due to badgers digging extensive underground tunnels since last summer. Birmingham City Council confirmed that "badger activity has recently caused significant damage to part of the site." One distressed mourner, whose family plot has been dug out by the stripy-headed nocturnal mammals, fears it is only a matter of time before human remains are brought above ground. "I know they are a protected species, but who is protecting our graves?" she asked. *birminghammail.co.uk*, 15 Jan 2021.

### CANAL BADGER RESCUE

Two badgers have been rescued from a canal in South Wales. One managed to scale a ladder and reach dry land, but the other became stuck in the ladder and was freed by RSPCA officers, assisted by members of the fire service. The badgers are being nursed back to full health before being released back into the wild. *BBC News*, 9 Feb 2021.

### SKELECASTER

A black metal musician has repurposed a skeleton and made an electric guitar. The musician, Prince Midnight, a Florida resident, had his uncle Filip's skeleton removed from a cemetery in Greece and sent over to the USA, where he built the custom instrument he calls the Filip Skelecaster. "You have to strum inside the rib cage, so there are no sweeping chords like Pete Townshend of The Who," he said, in response to a query as to whether it played OK. "You can only strum as wide as the ribs will allow." *guitarworld.com*, 10 Feb 2021.

### NO JOKE

Damian Hammond, a Nottingham criminal known for walking around the city dressed as the Joker, was jailed for 16 years after he dropped a bowling ball on a council worker's head, leaving them with permanent brain damage. His victim was collecting a discarded TV set from the street when Hammond, high on Mamba (a synthetic cannabinoid akin to Spice) called out that he wanted the TV before dropping the ball 14ft onto his victim from his first-floor window. *independent.co.uk*, 6 Feb 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### ANIMAL HOSPITAL

An escaped cow ran inside a Colombian hospital's waiting room where it began attacking patients, knocking over furniture and generally creating panic. Eventually, two men managed to grab the enraged bovine's collar and began pulling it away, but not before it attempted to charge an injured woman trapped on the floor. As the cow left the hospital, a group of people clapped and whistled at it. Nobody was seriously injured, but two motorcycles and some chairs were damaged. The animal's owner later visited the hospital to apologise for its behaviour. *metro.co.uk*, 15 Feb 2021.

### SPIT AND STONES

A new study suggests that snakes may have developed venom to defend themselves against humans, and first employed it as defence rather than attack. Researchers found that spitting cobras initially project venom from their fangs to keep potential predators at bay, and not to kill prey. Snake venom can travel up to 8ft (2.5 metres), and scientists believe this ability evolved in response to human attacks and the need for a long-distance defence. Bipedal humans with both hands free were literally able to throw the first stone. *D. Telegraph*, 22 Jan 2021.

### TINY TERRORS

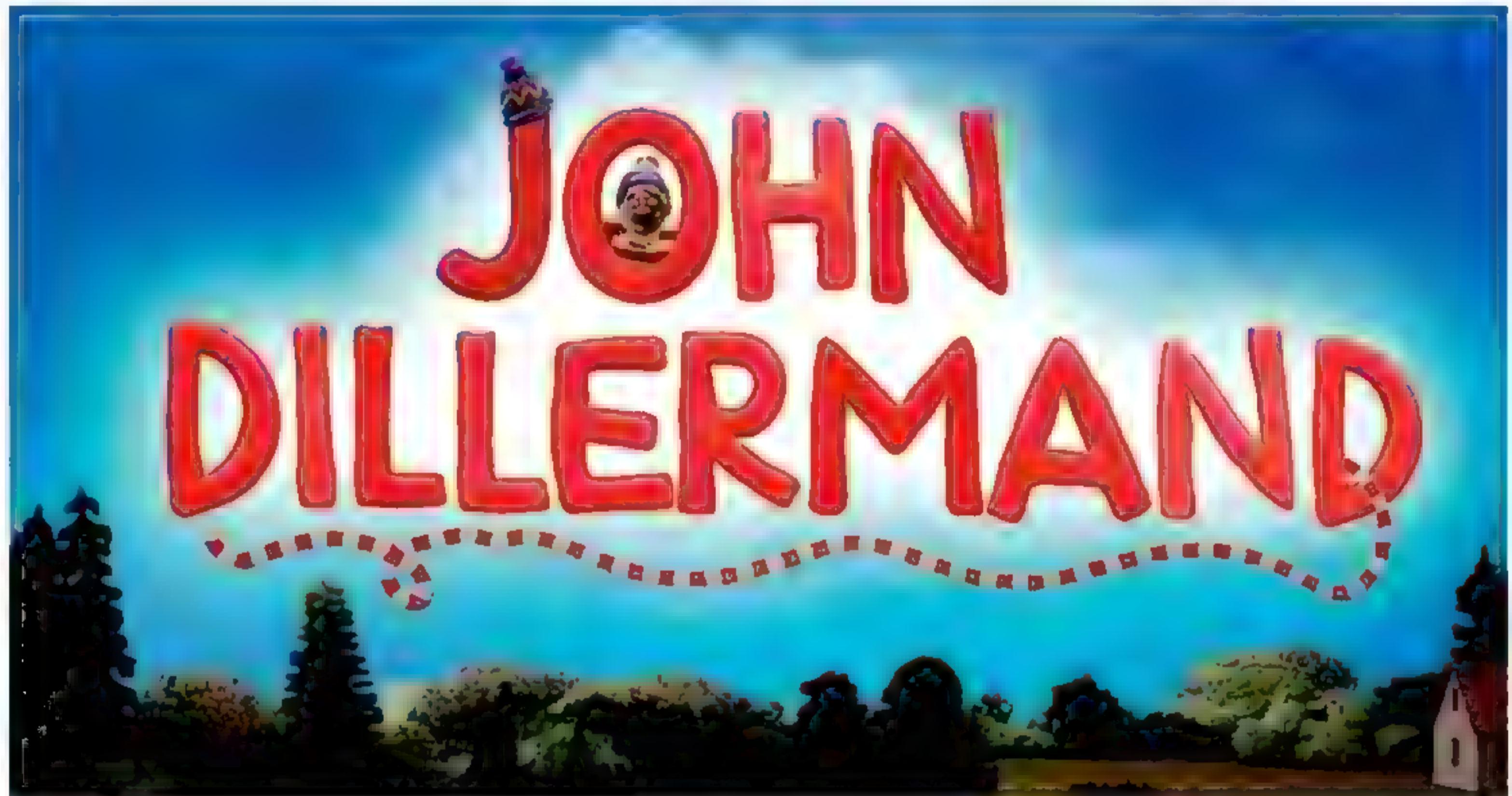
A team of palaeontologists have discovered that baby tyrannosaurs could hunt directly after hatching. The reptiles emerged from their eggs about 3ft (1m) long and, because of their size and powerful jaws, were able to predate on lizards, frogs and small mammals immediately. *D. Telegraph*, 26 Jan 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

## DANISH DICK DRAMA

Prehensile penis sparks children's TV controversy



DR TV

### THE PENIS MAN

Denmark's equivalent of the BBC, DR, has launched a new animated series aimed at four-to eight-year-olds about John Dillermand, a man with the world's longest penis ('diller' is Danish slang for penis, so 'dillermand' literally means 'penis-man'). With his enormous schlong, he can perform feats such as conduct rescue operations, etch murals, hoist a flag and even steal ice-cream from children.

Unsurprisingly, the show has met with criticism. "Is this really the message we want to send to children while we are in the middle of a huge #MeToo wave?" wrote Danish author Anne Lise Marstrand-Jørgensen.

The programme comes just months after TV presenter Sofie Linde kickstarted Denmark's #MeToo movement. Christian Groes, an associate professor and gender researcher at Roskilde University, said he believed the programme's celebration of the power of male genitalia could set equality back. "It's perpetuating the standard idea of a patriarchal society and normalising 'locker room culture'... that's been used to

excuse a lot of bad behaviour from men. It's meant to be funny – so it's seen as harmless. But it's not".

But Erla Heinesen Højsted, a clinical psychologist who works with families and children, said she believed the show's critics may be overthinking things. "John Dillermand talks to children and shares their way of thinking – and kids do find genitals funny," she suggested. "The show depicts a man who is impulsive and not always in control, who makes mistakes – like kids do, but crucially, Dillermand always makes it right. He takes responsibility for his actions. When a woman in the show tells him that he should keep his penis in his pants, for instance, he listens. Which is nice. He is accountable."

Højsted admitted the timing was poor and that a show about bodies might have considered depicting "difference and diversity" beyond an oversized male organ. "But this is categorically not a show about sex," she said. "To pretend it is projects adult ideas onto it."

DR has a reputation for pushing boundaries. Another

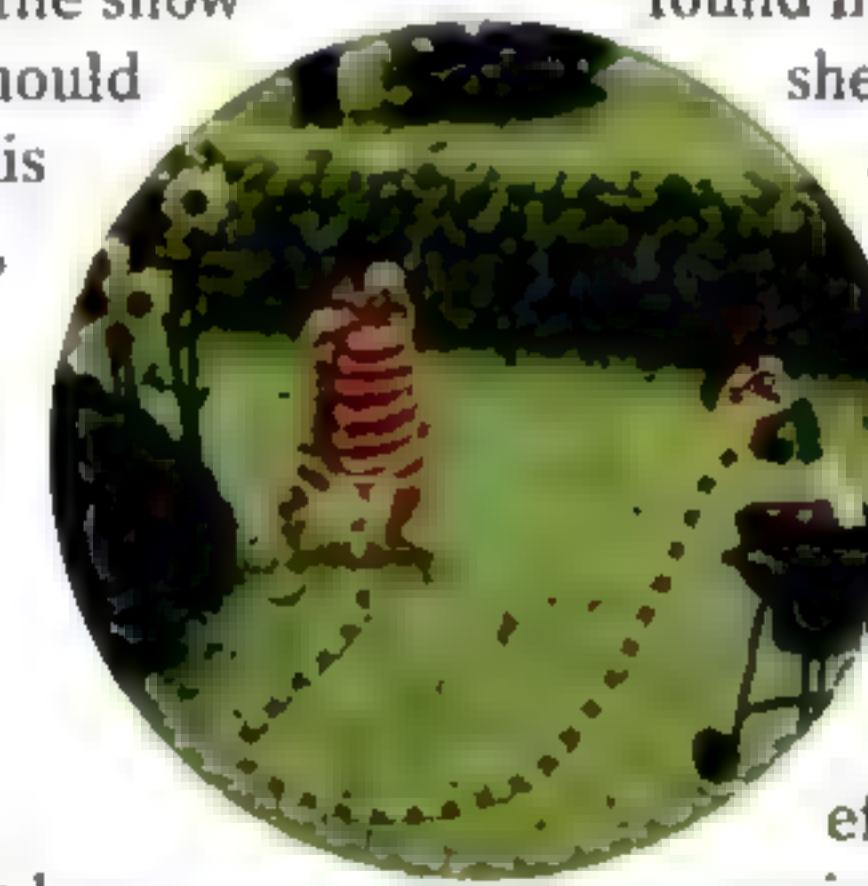
popular children's TV character is Onkel Reje, who curses, smokes a pipe and avoids bathing. Gepetto News, a spoof news programme for children featuring puppets, had a character who loved cross-dressing. And Ultra Smider Tøjet ('Ultra Strips Down') caused outrage in 2020 for presenting children aged 11-13 alongside a panel of nude adults.

The public service broadcaster responded to the latest criticism about their new star John Dillermand by arguing it could just as easily have made a programme "about a woman with no control over her vagina." *Guardian*, 6 Jan 2021.

### LONG-LOST JOHNNY

A 120-year-old condom has been found in Japan. The vintage sheath was identified

as one of the first mass-marketed condoms in Japan, the Yamato Kinu model, a brand that earned its popularity due to its reputation as an effective protective against syphilis. Major outbreaks of the disease, known as baidoku (literally 'plum poison'), had afflicted Japan at the turn of the 20th century. Newspaper adverts for the Yamato Kinu product have been dated to as far back as 1896. *soraneews24.com*, 25 Jan 2021.





# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 257: BEHOLD THE LAND OF LOST (DIS)CONTENT

An affectionate tweaking of our subject's best-known line. Just as (in the words of Bertolt Brecht) "He got onto the gallows like Pilate into the Creed," so AE Housman makes it into this column on the strength of an indirect link with Fort.

As detailed elsewhere (FT135:24), Fort (p670) devoted space to the fraudulent claim (1924) that the 109 lost books of Livy's *Histories* had been discovered. This hoax was quickly exposed, among others by Housman's letter to the *Times* (23 Sept 1924, p13).

What Fort knew or cared about Housman I have no idea. But, he will surely have read this letter, being a devotee of the *Times*, judging by the multiplicity of references in Schlanger's *Index to Books*.

Amusingly, this business would resurface decades later in *Billy Bunter's Postal Order* (1951) wherein is mentioned "a rumour that the lost books of Livy had been found," prompting the remark that one boy (Coker) "would have been more interested in losing the known books."

Several puzzles and one notoriety further draw Housman into the Classical Corner orbit. Why, for easy beginning, is *The Shropshire Lad* so entitled? It was originally going to be *Poems by Terence Hearsay*, until talked out of this by classical colleague AW Pollard. Terence has been taken to allude to the homonymous Roman comic playwright; more plausible is the notion that Terence denoted Housman himself – a friend complains in the penultimate stanza, "Terence, this is stupid stuff."

Housman was not born in Shropshire, never lived there, and wrote much of the work before ever visiting it. It is often suggested he was enchanted by its striking toponyms, just as often pointed out that he made frequent mistakes. His Shropshire was half-mythical, half patriotic romance; he obviously knew how classical poets used Arcadia in this way.

Chief interest for Housman will have been the Shrewsbury School, famous for its classics and formidable headmaster Benjamin Hall Kennedy, author of that celebrated Latin Primer on which my generation was brought up, immortalised in the Molesworth cartoon 'Kennedy discovers the gerund and leads it back into captivity.'

Peter Parker (*Housman Country: Into the Heart of England*, 2016) claims that Shropshire is the coldest county in England, something that well fits Housman,



described by all who met him as the coldest person they'd ever met, though occasionally thawing into prim – AC Benson described him as "Descended from a long line of maiden aunts."

Having taken a First in 'Mods' (Classical Moderations) at Oxford, Housman stunningly failed his 'Greats' (Litteræ Humaniores). There are various explanations: distraught by his father's illness and the family's financial troubles; simply not doing enough work; mooning over Moses Jackson, fellow-student and object of his unrequited homosexual passion.

I have a further theory. Housman made no secret of his contempt for the alleged poor Greek of the famous Benjamin Jowett. The latter must have known of this. Did he ensure that the examiners would wreak vicarious revenge this way? – a stratagem for which Hugh Trevor Roper would later be famous.

Housman was not Jowett's only critic. Another contemporary described his lecturing style as "Getting up quietly and giving a few faint glimpses into the obvious" – a quip worthy of Tom Stoppard's Housman play *The Invention of Love*.

The following ditty went the Oxford rounds:

Here come I, my name is Jowett  
All there is to know I know it  
I am Master of this college  
What I don't know isn't knowledge.  
Jowett was also supposed to have warned an agnostic student: "If you do not believe in God by 9am tomorrow you will be sent down."

Housman's homosexuality is beyond question. He got nowhere with the resolutely heterosexual Moses Jackson, who emigrated and died in Canada, but may have had better luck with Moses's brother Adalbert, but this is evidence-less speculation. This was of course the age

of Oscar Wilde. The two universities were no strangers to what the Diary of Dudley Ryder (1715-6) called "the most pervasive vice" and what was in Housman's day dubbed 'The Higher Sodomy'; cf. Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994).

"The slashing style which all know and few applaud." Thus wrote John Percival Postgate, fellow-classicist and victim of Housman's notorious invective, albeit, as many others, no slouch himself at dealing it out. As Paul Naiditch remarks in an essay on this, "Traditionally, classical scholars, and British classical scholars among them, speak ill of others."

Postgate and Wallace Martin Lindsay were two of Housman's most notable sparring partners at home. Postgate was otherwise distinguished for his stinginess in denying his children nursery heat and lights and scraping "excess butter" from their toast. He was killed when his bicycle collided with a steam lorry, perhaps parsimonious to the end, his last words being "Take me to Addenbrookes; I have a subscription there." Another nearby hospital would be where Housman expired in 1936. By almost fortean coincidence, Lindsay also died in an accident, his bicycle colliding with a motorbike.

Another fellow-classicist, Robinson Ellis, was dismissed as "Having the intellect of an idiot child". Unfair at the scholarly level, where Ellis produced work still used on Roman poets. But, he was famously eccentric (caricatured in an 1894 *Vanity Fair* cartoon) in dress, conversation, lecturing style, indeed everything, culminating in his failed attempt to commit suicide by shooting himself in the face, thus prefiguring Unity Mitford.

Housman took especial pleasure in mocking German classicists, ranging from such one-liners as "Indeed I imagine that Mr Buecheler when he first perused Mr Sudhaus' edition of the *Ætna*, must have felt like Sin when she gave birth to death," to this full-dress assassination: "Not only did Jacob have no sense for grammar, no sense for coherency, no sense for sense, but being himself possessed by a passion for the clumsy and the hispid he imputed this disgusting taste to all the authors whom he edited..."

Fort was often acerbic (e.g. on Dr Grimme, p671), but Housman in full flight outdoes even AA Gill on restaurants, the Welsh, and Carol Vorderman.



PAUL SIEVEKING admires a long-lost royal figurine, some trippy cave art and some lockdown finds

### GOLDEN WONDER

In 2017, while walking through a field near Market Harborough in Northamptonshire, Kevin Duckett, 49, found a shiny object that he first thought was some crumpled tin foil from the wrapping of a 1970s Mr Kipling cake. "I'd been there about 20 minutes and found nothing," said the amateur metal detectorist, who lives in Fleckney, Leicestershire. "Then I got a very loud positive signal from my detector and started to dig down before spotting something. It was lodged in the side of a hole just a few inches down. I carefully removed it and knew by its colour and weight that it was solid gold."

The 2.5in (6.4cm) long object, said to be worth up to £2 million, is now at the British Museum. It turns out to be a figurine from the crown that Henry VIII wore for processions on the feast of Epiphany. It represents Henry VI standing on an antelope, the heraldic beast of the Lancastrian kings, with SH (Saint Henry) inscribed on the base. Prayers to the king (who ascended the throne in 1422) led to miracles and images of him appeared in churches and prayer books. Under Henry VII, the tomb of Henry VI at Windsor became the most popular pilgrimage site in England.

The crown was first documented in 1521. Its five fleurs-de-lys were originally adorned with three figures of Christ, one of St George and one of the Virgin and Child. Henry VIII removed the figures of Christ and replaced them with three royal saints representing the Magi – St Edmund, Edward the Confessor and Henry VI. A portrait of Charles I, painted in 1631 by Daniel Mytens, shows the king standing next to the crown; and in 2012, the painting was used to create a replica of the crown, now on display at Hampton Court.

In 1650, a year after Charles I's beheading, Oliver Cromwell had the crown – weighing 7lb 6oz (3.3kg) and valued at £1,100 – melted down and minted as 'unites' (English Republican coins roughly equivalent in value to a pound). Its 344 gems and pearls were bagged up and eventually sold, but there was no mention of the three royal figurines. The Henry VI figurine was unearthed on the route taken by Charles I as he fled from Cromwell's cavalry after the Battle of Nasby on 14 June 1645. Charles lost his pistols as he charged through the Roundheads to escape. The king's baggage was captured and there was a massacre of up to 400 women in the baggage train on the road to East Farndon. The figurine was found by a pond near the main road to Market Harborough, east of East Farndon and south of Bloodyman's Ford. Was it lost or concealed in 1645,



more than three years before the crown was melted down? Was Charles carrying it as a magical talisman? It seems likely we will never know. *D.Telegraph*, 18 Dec 2020, 31 Jan 2021; [thesun.co.uk](https://thesun.co.uk), [dailymail.com](https://dailymail.com), 30 Jan 2021.

### EARLIEST CAVE PAINTING

The world's oldest known cave painting, a life-sized picture of a wild pig made at least 45,500 years ago, was found on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia in December 2017. It is located in the Leang Tedongnge cave in a remote valley enclosed by sheer limestone

cliffs, about an hour's walk from the nearest road. It is only accessible during the dry season because of flooding during the wet season – and had never before been seen by Westerners. The finding was described in the journal *Science Advances* on 13 January 2021 and provides the earliest evidence of human settlement of the region.

Measuring 136x54cm (53x21in), the Sulawesi warty pig (*Sus celebensis*) a wild stubby-legged beast that can weigh up to 190lb (85kg), was painted using dark red ochre and has a short crest of upright hair, as well as a pair of horn-like facial warts characteristic of adult males of the species. There are two handprints above the pig's hindquarters, and it appears to be facing two other pigs that are only partially preserved. It seems to be observing a fight or social interaction between the other warty pigs. In a nearby cave, called Leang Balangajia 1, an even larger painted pig was spotted on the ceiling, measuring about 6.1 by 3.6ft (187x110cm), with four stencilled hands on it. That cave chamber has at least two other animal paintings, but they are too damaged to decipher. Humans have hunted Sulawesi warty pigs for tens of thousands of years, and may have domesticated them. They are found nowhere else and are a key feature of the region's prehistoric artwork, particularly during the Ice Age.

Maxime Aubert of Australia's Griffith University, a dating specialist, identified a calcite deposit that had formed on top of the painting, and used uranium-series isotope dating to show that the deposit was 45,500 years old. This makes the painting at least that age, "but it could be much older



TOP: The figurine from a crown worn by Henry VIII. ABOVE: A wild pig in the world's oldest cave painting.

because the dating that we're using only dates the calcite on top of it," he explained. The previously oldest dated rock art painting – depicting a group of part-human, part-animal figures hunting mammals – was also found in Sulawesi and was at least 43,900 years old. The Leang Balangajia paintings are at least 32,000 years old. The paintings are thought to be the work of *Homo sapiens*, as opposed to an extinct human species such as the Denisovans, but this isn't certain. To make handprints, the artists would have had to place their hands on the rock and spit pigment over them, so it might be possible to extract DNA samples from residual saliva.

Meanwhile, the oldest known drawing (of any kind) made by a human is a 73,000-year-old hashtag painted on a rock flake from South Africa. [AFP], *livescience.com*, 13 Jan 2021.

## TRANCE FLOWER

Pinwheel Cave rock art in California may depict Datura, the hallucinogenic 'trance flower'. Just before going into a hallucinogenic trance, Indigenous Californians who had gathered in a cave probably looked up to the rocky ceiling, where a pinwheel and big-eyed moth were painted in red. This mysterious 'pinwheel' is thought to be a depiction of the delicate, white flower of *Datura wrightii*, an hallucinogen the Chumash people took for ceremonial, medicinal and supernatural purposes. The moth is probably a species of hawk moth, known for its 'loopy' intoxicated flight after slurping up Datura's nectar. Chewed globs that humans stuck to the cave's ceiling provide more evidence of these ancient trips; these up to 400-year-old lumps, known as quids, contained the mind-altering drugs scopolamine and atropine, which are found in Datura.

The finding marks "the first clear evidence for the ingestion of hallucinogens at a rock art site," the researchers wrote in the study, published online in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. The artists probably weren't high when they drew the rock art, however. "It's extremely unlikely because of the debilitating effects of Datura," study lead researcher David Robinson, a reader in archaeology at the University of Central Lancashire, told *Live Science*. Rather, just like religious artwork and objects in a church, these rock paintings were likely "setting the scene" and helping people about to go into a trance to understand the flower's power and the tradition of taking the hallucinogen in that particular cave.

Archaeologists first learned about the rock paintings in 1999, when workers at Wild Wolves Preserve, a nature reserve 90 miles (145km) northeast of Santa Barbara, found a pinwheel and insect painted with ochre. At first glance, the 4in by 7in (10.5x17cm) pinwheel drawing doesn't look



ABOVE: Rock art in Pinwheel Cave, California (left) appears to mimic the shape of an unfurled Datura flower.

much like a Datura flower, but any botanist would tell you otherwise. Datura (aka Jimson weed and angel trumpet) unfurls at dusk and dawn when insects pollinate it, but during the heat of the day it twists up. It's possible this cave painting features an opening Datura flower. Researchers already knew the Chumash people used Datura for ceremonies and in everyday life, according to historic descriptions from missionaries and anthropological work. Historians think Datura was used to gain supernatural power for doctoring, to counteract negative supernatural events, to ward off ghosts, and to see the future or find lost objects, but, most especially, as a medicant for a variety of ailments. It was also put in a tea called toloache for a coming-of-age ceremony for boys (and sometimes girls), who took the plant to mark their entrance into adulthood.

However, the researchers needed more evidence than cave art to suggest that Indigenous people used this site for Datura ceremonies. So the team investigated the quids stuffed into the ceiling's crevices. Quids, known from other archaeological sites in the American Southwest, are plants usually chewed for their nutrients or stimulants, including yucca, agave or tobacco. In this case, 3D digital microscopy revealed that the quids in Pinwheel Cave were also likely chewed. They consistently had indentations that one would expect from molars. The quid fibres were also matted together, which one would expect to occur through moisture that would make it adhere, such as human saliva. Chemical analysis revealed the presence of the Datura's hallucinogenic compounds atropine and scopolamine, and a scanning electron microscope analysis further identified the quids as Datura, although one was made of yucca. After the quids were chewed, they were apparently stuck into the ceiling, like a piece of chewed gum.

Radiocarbon dating shows the cave was

used on and off again from about 1600 to the late 1800s. Indigenous people used it for many other purposes: projectile points and an arrow shaft straightener, indicated the cave might have been used for preparing hunting tools, while ground seeds and animal remains suggest it was also employed for food preparation, storage and communal meals. The new discovery helps dismantle the myth of the lone shaman, going into a cave by himself to have a mystical experience. This is a community site. The Tejon Indian tribe, comprising the descendants of the Chumash, Yokuts and Kitanemuk peoples, still use the site today. *livescience.com*, 23 Nov 2020.

## LOCKDOWN DISCOVERIES

Metal-detecting was prohibited or restricted during lockdowns in 2020, leading to a marked increase in finds made while gardening, including 50 South African one-ounce gold Krugerrands from the 1970s unearthed in Milton Keynes. Weeding a garden in the New Forest, Hampshire, revealed a hoard of 63 gold coins (and one silver) from the reigns of Edward IV through to Henry VIII. Unusually, four Henry VIII coins featured the initials of his wives Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour. From Old Basing in Hampshire came a copper-alloy Roman furniture fitting decorated with the face of the god Oceanus framed by intricate seaweed fronds, an artefact with no close parallel. Tiny dolphins beneath each ear swim down towards the god's chin, while serpentine creatures rest on either side of his temples. A lead-alloy mediæval seal matrix in the name of David, Bishop of St Andrews, identified as David de Bernham (r. 1239-53), was discovered in Dursley, Gloucestershire. Given the cheap material and crude craftsmanship, this is thought to be a contemporary forgery, perhaps used to authenticate copied documents. *British Museum press release*, 9 Dec 2020.

# Spaceship 'Oumuamua?

DAVID HAMBLING reports on the latest controversy caused by our recent interstellar visitor



'Oumuamua, pronounced "Oh-mooah-mooah", was the first known object from interstellar space to pass through our Solar System (see **FT346:14**). Literally as soon as it appeared in 2017 some suggested that it might be an alien spacecraft; the name Rama was proposed after a giant interstellar vessel visiting the Solar System in a 1973 Arthur C Clarke novel. Instead it was given the equally suggestive Hawaiian name meaning Scout, having been first spotted from an observatory in Maui. Harvard astronomer Avi Loeb has held on to the spacecraft theory, and is now releasing a book claiming it is "The First Sign of Intelligent Life Beyond Earth".

This claim put Loeb at odds with the astrophysics community. The conflict is over interpretation rather than data. Loeb says other scientists are not being sufficiently open-minded; they believe he is focusing too much on one improbable explanation.

'Oumuamua is strikingly different in appearance to most space objects, being roughly cigar-shaped and hundreds of metres long and some tens of metres across. It appears to be tumbling through space rather than simply rotating. Astronomers do not know whether it is a single monolithic object like an asteroid, a 'dusty snowball' of water ice like a comet, or even an iceberg made of solid hydrogen. Early suggestions that it could have come from a nearby star having now been discounted. From its trajectory 'Oumuamua has probably been travelling through the Milky Way for millions of years.

What really excited astronomers, Loeb in particular, was that 'Oumuamua accelerated as it moved away from the Sun. This could not be accounted for by gravitational forces. The best guess was that it was caused by outgassing, frozen hydrogen boiling off to produce a rocket-propulsion effect. This is seen in comets, although 'Oumuamua did not leave a visible

tail like a comet.

Loeb proposes a quite different cause. He sees 'Oumuamua not as a massive, three-dimensional object as other astronomers assume, but as a flat sheet less than a millimetre thick. He writes: "One possibility is that 'Oumuamua is a lightsail, floating in interstellar space as debris from advanced technological equipment."

The concept of the lightsail was introduced by Russian scientist Friedrich Zander in 1924. Light exerts a small but definite pressure when it is reflected from a surface. Zander suggested that a spacecraft with a large enough sail could be carried by sunlight just as a schooner is driven by the breeze. It takes a very large sail though: sunlight only exerts a force of about a thousandth of a gram per square metre, so a sail the size of a football pitch would only lift the weight of a 20p piece.

Lightsails will never replace rockets, but they could be useful for interplanetary travel away from Earth's immediate gravity. Because lightsails do not require propellant, unlike rockets they never run out of fuel. And the slow, steady acceleration from a lightsail adds up over time. In 2015 the Planetary Society launched a satellite with the first lightsail able to carry out manoeuvres by light pressure alone. NASA has a more ambitious project on the launch pad, the Near-Earth Asteroid Scout. This will use the thrust from a lightsail to get a close-up view of an asteroid that could not be approached with conventional propulsion.

'Oumuamua's slight acceleration was the right order of magnitude for a lightsail, and it is not surprising that Loeb should be thinking in those terms. He was part of the team working on Breakthrough Starshot, a private initiative funded by Mark Zuckerberg among others to send a lightsail-powered craft to Alpha Centauri. Sunlight alone would not be enough to make the journey in a reasonable time, so it will be boosted by

gigawatt-powered space-based lasers.

While others insist that seeing 'Oumuamua as something artificial requires a stretch of the imagination, Loeb responds that the problem is scientists' lack of imagination. "If you show a cellphone to a caveman who looked at rocks all of his life, the caveman would conclude that the cellphone is just a well-polished rock... You need to be open-minded in order to find wonderful things," Loeb told CNET news.

Others are not convinced by these "wonderful things".

"A shocking example of sensationalist, ill-motivated science," astrophysicist Ethan Siegel wrote in *Forbes* magazine. North Carolina State University astrophysicist Katie Mack described Loeb's theory as simple trolling for publicity. A research team from the International Space Science Institute found no compelling evidence for an alien explanation for 'Oumuamua, and dismissed Loeb's theory as not based on fact.

The argument echoes the debate about whether the Viking lander found chemical evidence of life in 1976 (see **FT389:12**). Both theories fit the facts, but one requires alien life: the disagreement is over whether this is a wild leap or a logical extrapolation of known laws.

The best way to resolve any scientific argument is usually by gathering more data. Unfortunately, 'Oumuamua has left our Solar System and is no longer around to be scrutinised. If it was a scout, it passed by without stopping. There was not enough warning to train all of the best instruments on it, and there is no realistic possibility of sending a space probe in pursuit to examine it more closely.

As the first interstellar object, it was unprecedented. We simply have nothing to compare it to. With an asteroid or comet, astronomers have an idea of what constitutes normal, but in this case there is no benchmark for comparison.

However, the world's astronomers are now primed to detect and inspect objects from outside the Solar System, and a second one, Borisov – or 2I/Borisov, indicating the second interstellar object – was found in 2019. This time the object was positively identified as a comet, albeit an unusual one. As more interstellar visitors are catalogued and studied, we may discover whether 'Oumuamua was a typical example of the type, or an anomaly that could only be the product of alien manufacture.



# SIGNAL FROM SPACE

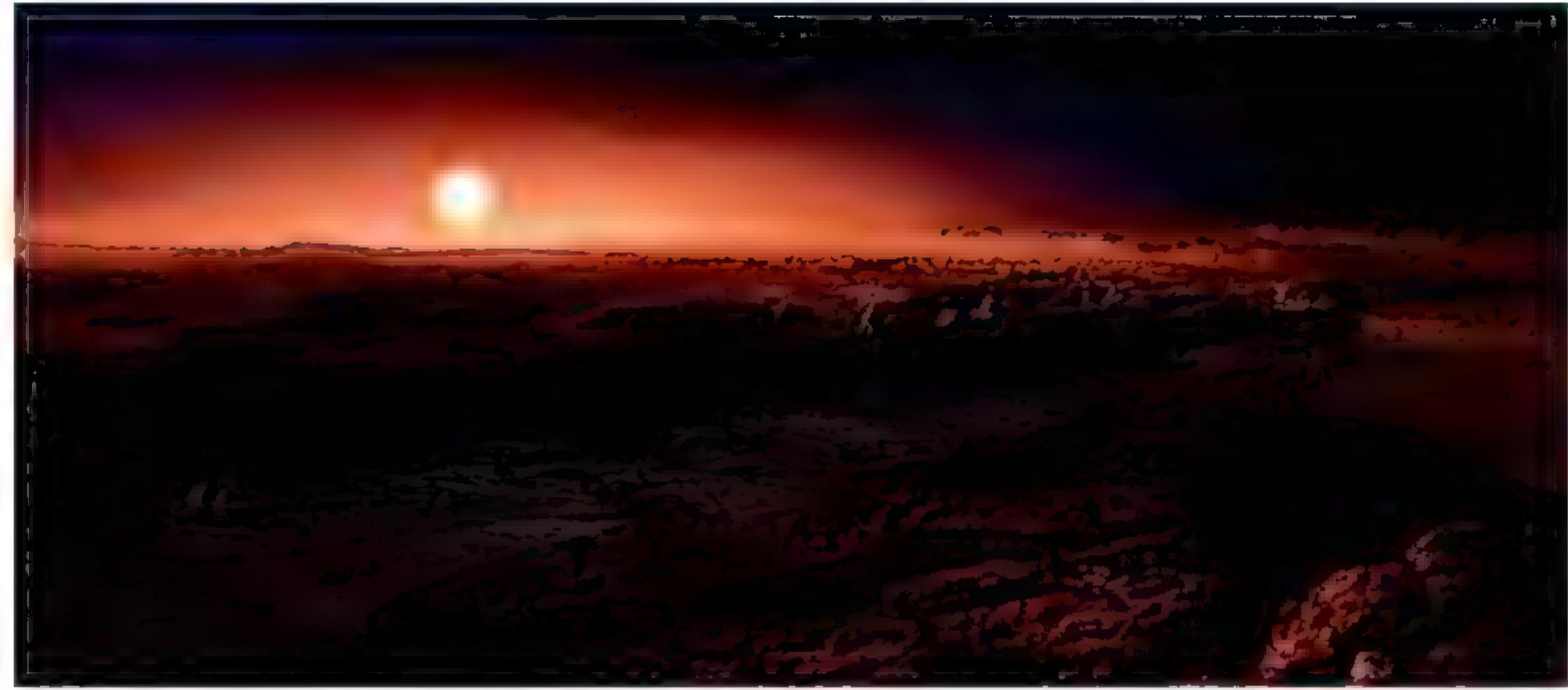
Does a mysterious radio signal from Proxima Centauri mean that ET is calling? Plus, teleporting mouse brains

## RADIO PROXIMA

A strange radio signal from Proxima Centauri is being "carefully investigated" by a team of astronomers. Researchers from the Breakthrough Listen Project (searching for alien life with radio telescopes) have been studying the radio waves after they were first discovered by the Parkes telescope in Australia in April 2019. Unlike previous radio bursts, the 982.002MHz signal, labelled BLC1 (an abbreviation for the first Breakthrough Listen Candidate event), has not been attributed to any Earth-based or near-Earth human-created source, such as satellites. While it probably has a natural explanation, the Breakthrough team say this is one of the most intriguing radio signals since the Ohio-based Big Ear Radio Observatory detected a short-lived signal emanating from a distant star system in 1977. It was named 'WOW!', and was, until now, the best candidate for evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence (see FT157:44).

Proxima Centauri, a low mass star in the triple-star Alpha Centauri system, is not visible to the naked eye due to its size, eight times smaller than our Sun. It is the closest star to Earth after the Sun, being 4.2 light years away, and has at least two planets that we know of. Proxima c is a Jupiter-like gas giant that takes 5.2 light years to orbit round Proxima Centauri, and the smaller Proxima b, a rocky planet discovered in 2016 that takes 11.2 Earth days to circle its host star, orbiting Proxima Centauri in the 'habitable zone' – an area where liquid water could be flowing on the planet's surface rather than being evaporated by the star's heat. But this habitable zone is very close to the star itself – closer than Mercury is to our Sun – meaning Proxima b is subject to intense radiation as well as solar winds 2,000 times greater than those experienced on Earth. Thus, the planet is unlikely to be home to any alien civilisation – at least on its surface.

Shifts in the radio signal's frequency detected by the Parkes



ABOVE: An artist's impression of the surface of the rocky planet Proxima b, subject to intense radiation and powerful solar winds.

telescope are consistent with a planet's movement, and so may be suggestive of a third planet within the system. Researchers say it would be "very unlikely" that the signal's source is alien technology. Pete Worden, director of Breakthrough Initiatives, said the signals are most likely interference from Earth-based sources. But studies indicate Proxima b may have surface oceans and a thin atmosphere, prerequisites for the development of life. It is hoped that the James Webb Space Telescope, due to come online in 2021, could detect the composition of Proxima b's atmosphere, and there is also a theoretical mission to send a probe to the planet in 2069. The latter initiative was launched by Silicon Valley tech investor Yuri Milner in 2015, and seeks to find stray or intentional alien signals.

Professor Avi Loeb, chair of Harvard's Department of Astronomy, who has argued that 'Oumuamua is the first solid evidence for extraterrestrial civilisation (see p16), has poured cold water on the Proxima b theory. He has concluded the transmitter of the signal cannot be on the surface of Proxima b, or else its radio frequency would drift much more than observed based on its known acceleration around Proxima Centauri. He argues in a new paper, co-written with his student Amir Siraj, that the likelihood of another

civilisation transmitting such radio waves is exceedingly low, based on the Copernican principle. Terrestrial radio technology arose only in the last century of the 4.5-billion-year history of the Earth, and the Copernican principle asserts that humans on Earth are not privileged observers, unlike in Aristotle's cosmology, which placed the Earth at the centre of the Universe.

Our current understanding of the physical universe implies that Earth-sized planets reside in the habitable zone of roughly half of all sunlike stars, that tens of billions of sunlike stars reside in the Milky Way galaxy alone, that tens of billions of Milky Way-like galaxies exist in the observable volume of the present-day Universe, and that the Universe has no centre. Therefore, applying the same Copernican principle to the technological universe, the co-authors argue, it follows that the chances of a radio signal appearing now from our nearest star is minuscule. They believe BLC1 most likely originated from a human-built radio emitting oscillator on Earth that contaminated the telescope readings.

They conclude the paper with a curious caveat, asking whether intelligent life on Earth and its nearest star may be correlated. Interestingly, they say, Proxima Centauri became our nearest

star around the same time that *Homo sapiens* appeared on Earth. Is this merely coincidence, ask Loeb and Siraj? *D.Mail*, 18 Dec 2020; *scientificamerican.com*, 12 Jan 2021.

## TELEPORTING BRAINS

Scientists have developed a technique whereby the brain may be "teleported" by means of lasers. Using mice as experimental subjects, laser beams directed at the hippocampus, the area of the brain responsible for learning and memory, were able to stimulate 'place cells'. These become active when a sentient organism enters a new environment; the new location is then stored in its memory. Thus, by stimulating cells which do not correspond with a person's environment and surroundings, people could in theory be mentally teleported to another location which those cells are linked to in memory. University College London neuroscientists placed mice in one location, where they were given a reward of sugar water. The mice were then moved to a second location, and when the laser beams activated their brains' place cells, the mice attempted to locate the sugar water, believing they were still in their original location. The researchers have claimed their findings may be of use in developing new therapies to help Alzheimer's and dementia sufferers. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Nov 2020.



# Gentlemen prefer ghosts

ALAN MURDIE finds Marilyn Monroe continues to haunt Hollywood locations from beyond the grave

Nearly 60 years since the end of her earthly life on 5 August 1962, screen icon and Western fertility symbol Marilyn Monroe is back haunting her former Hollywood mansion. At least that's the latest claim regarding the tragic model and actress whose posthumous cult shows little signs of decline.

Marilyn's first spectral return was recounted soon after her death in 1962 by an Englishman whom Dennis Bardens (1911-2004) interviewed for his book *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965), though Bardens acknowledged the percipient might well have been mentally ill.

Now the most recent manifestations credited to her ghost are "weird voices" and footsteps "every single night" echoing through her old home. Guests feel an unseen presence 'hugging them'. These accounts from the property arise from Jasmine Chiswell, 25, renowned as a successful Monroe "lookalike" and known as "the Marilyn Monroe of TikTok" who, with her husband, now resides in the spacious house. The first hints of these experiences were mentioned in the Scottish *Daily Record* in April last year (Ms Chiswell is from originally from Lanarkshire) and more detail emerged with her interview for ITV's morning *Today* programme on 3 February 2021. She told presenters Philip Schofield and Holly Willoughby, "There's been so many weird things... My husband and I have tried to debunk the things we hear, but so many people have experienced things we just can't explain."

A curious and implausible feature is the regularity of auditory manifestations occurring "every night". No experienced ghost hunter would normally expect manifestations to be so regular and predictable. Phenomena that seemingly keep to a timetable are often suggestive of an unidentified natural cause, a point picked up by presenter Philip Schofield, who asked if the couple had looked for a reasonable explanation. It appears they had checked cars, investigating if noises from the road were responsible, or if there was an infestation by animals. So far



LEFT: Marilyn Monroe at LaGuardia Airport in 1959.

seen floating around her old house". There is certainly plenty of space for her to wander around a house that includes four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a 'tower room' adapted into an office, a wooden-beamed living room, a pool and a spa. It retains many of the original features from when it was occupied by Monroe. Jasmine now bathes in the same tiled bathtub and she has discovered relics from the past, including old magazines and a signature scrawled on a wooden beam.

The house is just one of the sites Marilyn Monroe frequented in life and to which her ghost supposedly returns.

An oft-repeated story alleges she materialises in a long mirror at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, Los Angeles, where she completed her first modelling assignment posing for a suntan oil commercial.

these checks have drawn a blank. At the same time, merely because a naturalistic explanation is possible, it does not necessarily follow one exists, mechanistic explanations being just one framework for examining such reports. All approaches depend upon their conceptual starting points, naturalism being just one of them.

On the attribution of the phenomena to Marilyn Monroe, as Holly Willoughby asked: "How do you know it's her?" Jasmine responded by admitting uncertainty over this, stating: "We've had a psychic over and she believes that it is her and possibly another ghost that likes to play tricks, but we don't know." This reflects the assumption of phenomena in haunted houses being essentially personal in nature, originating with a once-living human. Yet the actual grounds for drawing such a conclusion are often slight or non-existent. (See: *This Morning* ITV 3 Feb 2021; *Daily Record* 27 Apr 2020.)

Reports about the house have surfaced before. Thirty years ago, a story appeared in the *Herald Sun* newspaper for 12 March 1991 that Marilyn's spirit was "often

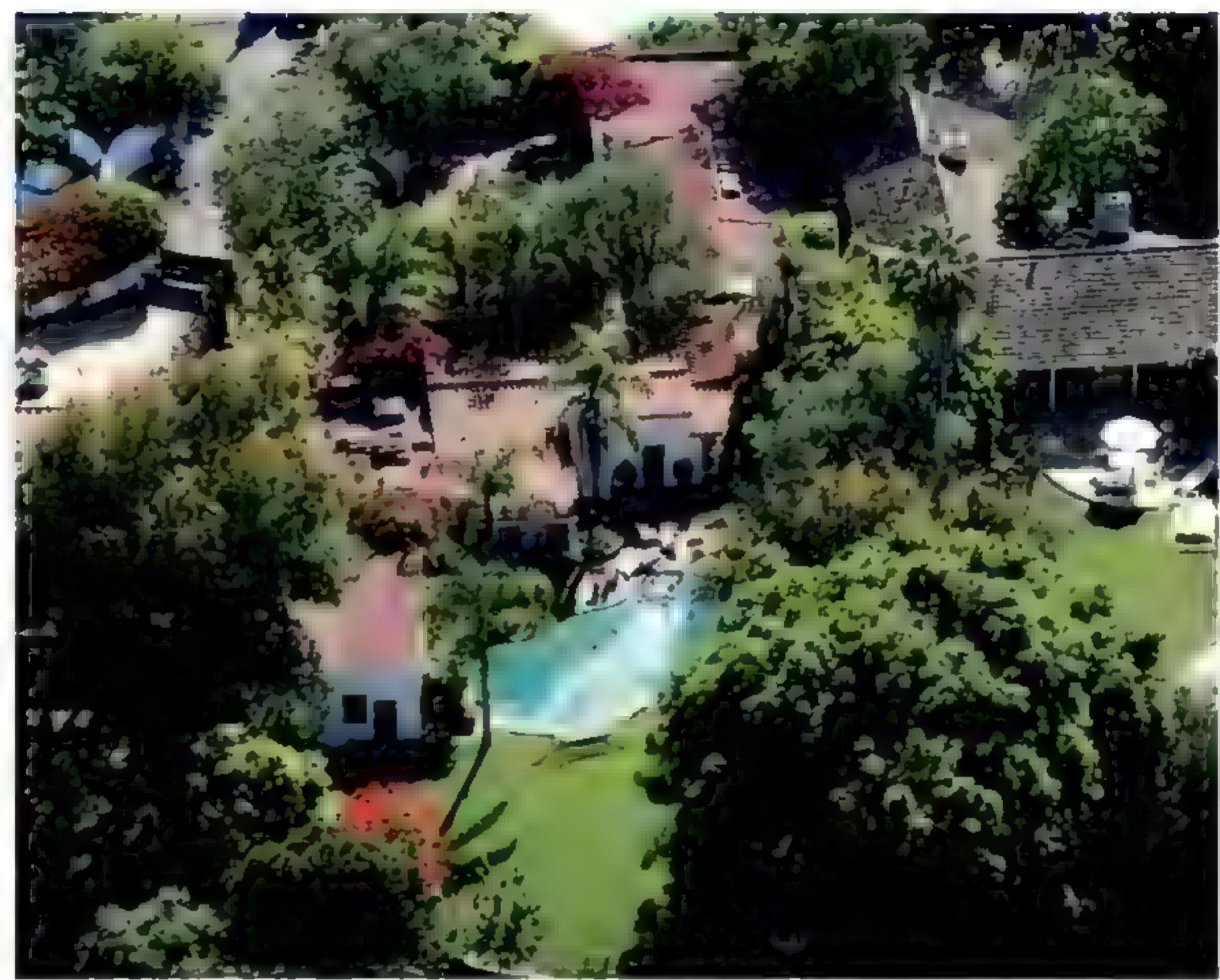
In later years, she often returned to stay in suite 246 by the pool. Stories date to September 1990 when the *Los Angeles Times* alleged her image was appearing in the full-length mirror in the room acquired from a film studio. Tales are told of a chambermaid cleaning the mirror, who said she clearly saw the reflection of a young blonde woman, seeming to be standing just behind her. When she turned, no one was there.

So popular did these rumours become that nine years later the paper reported check-in clerks were nonchalantly telling guests that Marilyn Monroe was prone to appear, "as matter-of-factly as if assuring one that there was a blow-dryer in the bathroom". (*LA Times*, 4 Sept 1990; 17 Jan 1999). This led to the *History Channel* descending on the hotel as part of its grand tour of paranormal hotspots covered in the broadcast *Haunted History: Haunted Hollywood* (26 August 2000), which also placed her ghost in the Ladies' Room.

By the time the mirror was moved into the lower-level lobby in 2010, the



ASMINE CHISWELL / INSTAGRAM



MEL BOIZAD / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Marilyn lookalike Jasmine Chiswell, at home in Monroe's old Hollywood house, which she says is haunted. ABOVE RIGHT: The house on Helena Drive was Monroe's final address; she was found dead there six months after moving in. BELOW: The Hotel Roosevelt also claims its own spectral Marilyn.

apparition had been reputedly "spotted by dozens of guests". Lisa Williams, a Californian medium, told of seeing a figure walking down the stairs into the bar. She recalled, "She looked at me and smiled. I said: 'Oh my God, I've just seen Marilyn!' She was wearing a pink outfit and looked very sexy."

Returning later to touching the mirror, she said: "I... could feel her presence. She's trapped between two worlds and hasn't passed into the light. She can't leave Hollywood: she still wants to be a part of it all." Duly communicating with the spirit in a mediumistic fashion, Miss Williams received the message: 'I just want to be loved'. Ms Williams felt Marilyn's shade to be "craving the love of a good man". (*Daily Express*, 21 Feb 2010).

For good measure, the ghost of actor Montgomery Clift, who died in 1966, is said to walk the ninth floor of the hotel where he once rented Room 928 when filming *From Here to Eternity*. Unfortunately, Ms Williams failed to enquire as to why Clift would not match Marilyn's requirements.

A third site of Marilyn's return is the Memorial Cemetery located at 1218 Glendon Avenue, Westwood. Her burial was arranged by her first husband, baseball champion Joe DiMaggio. His hopes she would rest in a tomb that fulfilled poet Andrew Marvel's requirement of being "a fine and private place" were thwarted by it becoming a shrine and pilgrimage

**"She hasn't passed into the light. She can't leave Hollywood and still wants be a part of it all"**

site for fans of dead celebrities (many other once-famous figures and celebrities also rest nearby). Reputedly, DiMaggio asked Monroe to marry him for the second time on 1 August 1962, just four days before her death. For more than 20 years afterwards, he poignantly arranged a thrice-weekly delivery of a bouquet of red roses to her crypt. Though his dying words were allegedly: "I'll finally get to see Marilyn," he lies hundreds of miles away in San Francisco. Eerily she manifests "floating above her tomb", but some locals over the 'sightings' are "just this strange pink ectoplasm – maybe it isn't her at all" adding: "Perhaps these formless blobs are the restless spirits of others there, who like Marilyn died under mysterious circumstances." These merely sound like photographic glitches and artefacts produced by digital cameras, dosed with wishful thinking.

(see: <https://patch.com/california/centurycity/does-marilyn-monroes-ghost-haunt-westwood>, 12 Feb 2011).

Further afield, the Cal Neva Resort, Spa and Casino at Crystal Bay on Lake Tahoe has also been listed as possibly being haunted by Marilyn (see **FT330:18-19**). In 2015, when walking across the stage, a former food and beverage manager felt a sudden chill and an inexplicable desire to take a photograph on his cell phone. However, the resultant strange image captured was



JASON CHANG / CREATIVE COMMONS



## HOSTWATCH



ABOVE: The Cal Neva Resort (it straddles the state line) has been named as another Monroe haunting site, as well as receiving post-mortem visits from none other than Frank Sinatra.

Interpreted as a native American shaman in robes and beads.

Claims of Marilyn Monroe making contact through mediums have circulated for years. Leslie Flint (1903-1994), a voice medium in Britain, channelled her along with Archimedes, Arthur Conan Doyle, Winston Churchill and Mahatma Gandhi in a career that spanned many decades. Recordings of many Flint séances survive in the form of 2,030 audiotapes made by engineer James Ellis from 1971 onwards, deposited at the University of Manitoba in 2003. (*The Times Union* (Albany, NY) 5 Oct 2003).

In 1994 Flint was succeeded in Britain by Stephen O'Brien, "The new Doris Stokes" as he was dubbed by *The Observer*. The paper's championing of liberal tolerance and diversity wavered when O'Brien claimed Monroe spoke with him to announce she considered "dying was the best thing that ever happened to her". Journalist Andrew Billen called O'Brien "runtish", "a fabulist" and a "misfit child who started making up stories about the world as he would wish it to be and found he could not stop." (*Observer*, 23 Jan 1994).

Two months later, Al Martinez of the *LA Times*, when interviewing psychic Kenny Kingston, proved more accepting. Kingston claimed to be a conduit for a variety of deceased personalities, Martinez recording: "At one point in our conversation he said hello to Marilyn Monroe so naturally that I turned, expecting to see her standing behind" – merely saying, "Is that weird or what?"

Others have tried to contact her themselves in the afterlife. Nicky Haslam, a socialite photographer and interior designer

in Anglo-American high society circles of whom it was written, "There can't be a man alive who has been to more parties", tells a story that Salvador Dalí and his wife Gala invited him to a séance to raise the ghost of Marilyn Monroe (*D.Mail*, 24 Oct 2009).

In August 1991, the Brotherhood Synagogue in Montreal banned a literary group called 'Beaux Arts' from holding a séance on their premises to conjure up her ghost. She converted to Judaism during her second marriage to playwright Arthur Miller. Declaring this contrary to Jewish

beliefs, director Philip Brockman said: "We don't do séances. It's irrelevant who they wish to contact. But I must say I have great respect for Marilyn Monroe." (*The Gazette* (Montreal) 27 Aug 1991).

Three years later, singer Britney Spears was trying the same. (See 'Britney's secret séance: Spears tries to contact Marilyn Monroe', *Daily Star*, 30 Oct 2004.)

However, all such efforts might be stillborn if claims of Marilyn Monroe returning to Earth through reincarnation were established. One who asserted the possibility was Sylvia Brown, who alleged that in a past life Marilyn was sold to a travelling band of gypsies but was rescued by her uncle who became her husband in her next life (see 'Sylvia Browne takes the case' in *Skeptic*, 22 June 2013).

One early reincarnation claimant was Madonna, who stated in 1992 how the "reincarnated spirit of Marilyn Monroe within me convinced me I'd be a star" (*Hindu Times*, 31 Jan 1992), followed by a Hungarian model named Zsuzsanna in 1999. The next candidate was Sherrie Lee Laird, a Canadian rock singer with the band *Pandemonium*. In 2006 Ms Laird announced: "This has been a long time coming. It's not a novelty thing." Her realisation emerged when, aged 12, she heard her aunt singing 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend'. She added: "I'm not crazy, and anybody who knows me will tell you that". The singer denied it was publicity for her band, averring: "If that was true, I would have done it 10 or 20 years ago. This could ruin my career." A few days after her declaration she visited Monroe's crypt



ABOVE: Singer Sherrie Lee Laird (right) was convinced she was the reincarnation of Marilyn, a claim backed up by past life regression pioneer Dr Adrian Finkelstein (left), who wrote a book about the case.



LEFT: Marilyn Monroe's final resting place at Westwood Village Memorial Cemetery, where she has supposedly manifested as an ectoplasmic blob. Hugh Hefner bought the adjacent tomb in 1992 so that he could spend eternity beside her.

to mark the 44th anniversary of the star's (or her own) earlier death.

Her claims received backing from Dr Adrian Finkelstein, a psychiatrist and pioneer in past life regression, who spent six and half years regressing the singer into her past life as Marilyn. He maintained significant similarities existed in facial bone structure, handwriting, voice patterns and personality traits between the two women, further speculating more evidence might emerge from DNA analysis and comparison of iris patterns. Finkelstein promoted a 2006 book *Marilyn Monroe Returns, The Healing of a Soul* (see *The Star Phoenix* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan), 3 Aug 2006 and many others).

Then Chris Vicens arrived, a 26-year-old shop assistant from Islington, London. *Asian News International* summarised his story thus: "Chris Vicens looks like any other man, but what you don't know is that he once lived as the blonde bombshell herself, Marilyn Monroe". This awareness arose from sessions with regression therapist Fiona Childs. Being regressed, he learned what he considered the truth about the death of Monroe stating: "She was murdered in her pool house, then dragged to the bedroom and stripped. Five people were involved in her death... each time I regress, I learn a little more. I like to think I am a sane and rational person. I am definitely not making this up. Why would I open myself up to ridicule?" he added. (ANI, 3 Dec 2010; *D.Mail*, 30 Nov 2010.)

Unfortunately, exhibitionism and column inches do not guarantee either authenticity or veracity. Nor is it easy to evaluate material obtained from mediumship and past life regressions. Assessing their validity

## "She was murdered in her pool house, then dragged to the bedroom and stripped..."

and significance, if any, demands wholly different methods of analysis conducted upon a number of different levels, together with delicacy, skill and at least some verifiable information.

Currently, in evidential terms, there is little proof of any post-mortem return by Marilyn Monroe. The reports of hauntings blamed upon her vexed ghost provide an example of what one may term the "Mrs Fitzherbert problem" at the Brighton Pavilion. Mrs Maria Fitzherbert (1756-1837) was a Catholic gentlewoman who caught the eye of George IV in his Regency years. Forbidden from marrying her, he took her as mistress and went through a secret marriage ceremony with her. For generations, her ghost has been said to haunt the Brighton Pavilion built by the portly monarch. But other than a sighting of a 'female figure' in the building, there is nothing to positively identify her as the ghost. However, the irresistible combination of romance, royalty and mystery ensures that any strange experiences reported on the premises are ascribed to her presence.

Regrettably, people do make up stories, especially about celebrities past and present, and tie them to ghost stories. Such obsessions can be seen with Louis Mayerling (real name George Carter) an eccentric fantasist who wrote the spurious

*We Faked the Ghosts of Borley Rectory* (2000) and claimed (along with much else) that he served as a dressmaker to Monroe. He alleged they shared a psychic experience in Great Hadham churchyard, Hertfordshire, when brushing hands together, whereupon they were immersed in a mystical golden light (see *FT81:34-36*, June 1995, which includes a summary of his far-fetched autobiography). No credibility can be attached to any of his tales, though he successfully duped several journalists keen on rubbishing the Borley story. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, 22 Oct 2000; *Guardian*, 30 Dec 2000 and repeated 31 Oct 2005; see the exposure in *The Borley Companion* (2009) by Peter Underwood, Paul Adams and Eddie Brazil, citing a revealing and incriminating interview with Mayerling by author Stewart Evans.

Thus, Holly Willoughby's question is a valid one about the origin of ghostly experiences at the star's old home. "It's Marilyn" provides an easy, catch-all label applicable to any nebulous or anonymous manifestations. Because Marilyn's image is so familiar, she can become a convenient spectral presence to be blamed for odd events.

For example, when Cathy Miller, the owner of the hairdressing salon Scandalous Hair Design in Portland, Oregon, began hearing footsteps, voices and finding her radio inexplicably cutting out for entire songs, she dubbed the odd events 'Marilyn' after a photograph of Marilyn Monroe inexplicably rattled. An attempt to quash this theory arose when a ghost hunter called to get his haircut and told Ms Miller "it's not Marilyn". Nonetheless, the nickname remains attached "because she likes that we call her that". ('When Spooky sells in St Helens' *The Oregonian* (Portland OR), 20 Oct 2012).

Whatever the case, it seems such tales meet a deep-felt popular need. A survey in the USA in 2013 of more than 1,000 men and women over 18 found most (79%) declared some belief in ghosts. Asked which ghost they would like to encounter, one-quarter (27%) of white participants wanted most to be haunted by Abraham Lincoln, followed by Marilyn Monroe at 23% (African Americans preferred Martin Luther King, at 44%, followed by Michael Jackson, at 25%). (Source: *PR Newswire*, 23 Oct 2013.)

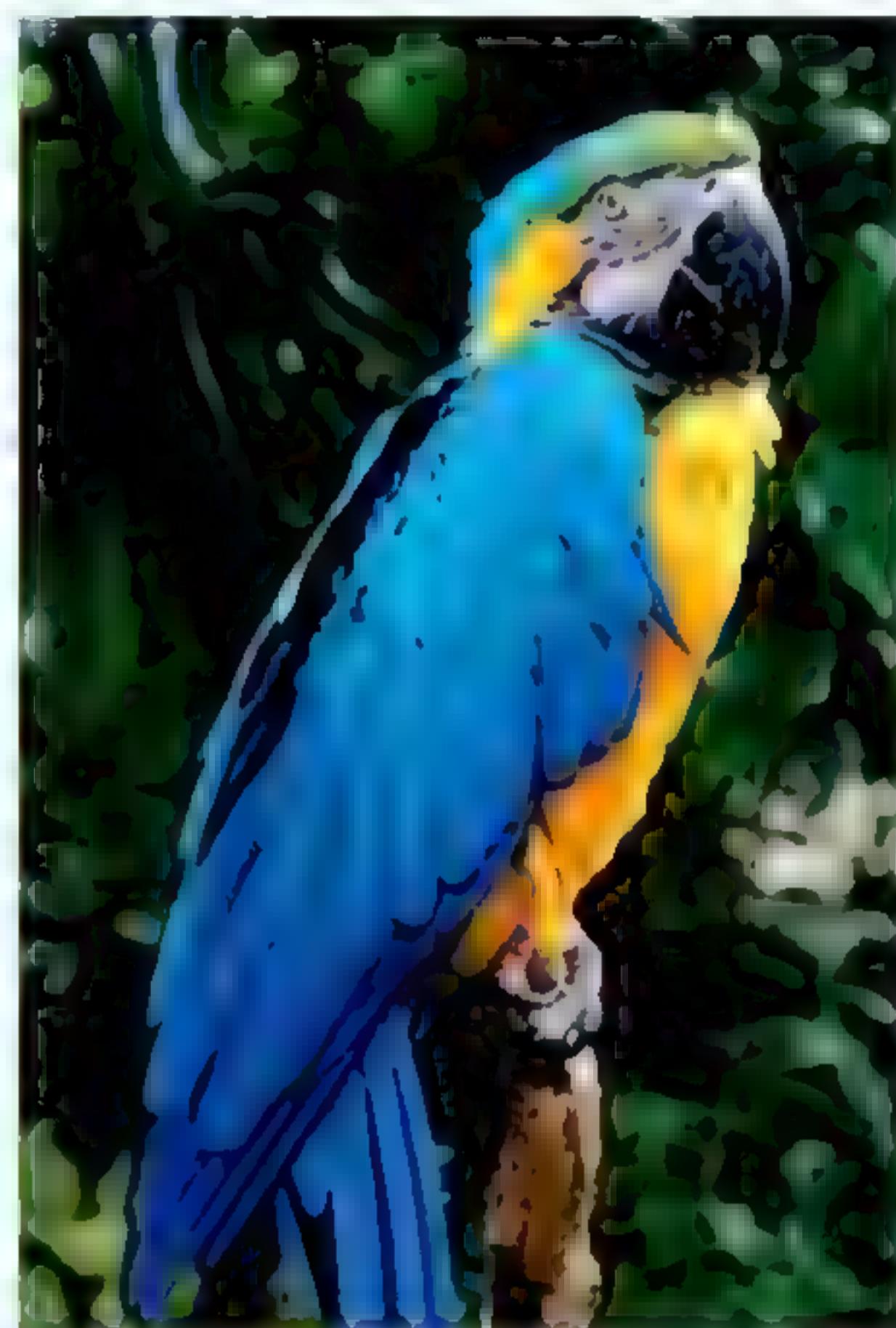
So, in death, as in her life, tragic Marilyn still remains the target for projected fantasies, hopes, dreams and emotions.



KARL SHUKER investigates the mystery of a South American macaw on a Roman mosaic



CHRISTIE'S



CINCINNATI ZOO / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE LEFT: The Roman marble mosaic with its mysterious macaw. ABOVE RIGHT: A blue-and-yellow macaw, *Ara ararauna* – what was it doing in ancient Rome?

### PARROTING A ROMAN RIDDLE

My grateful thanks to Brazil-based Facebook friend and parrot aficionado Rafael Nascimento for kindly bringing to my attention a most intriguing Roman marble mosaic panel decorated with depictions of birds and dating from around the second century AD, sold at auction on 11 December 2003 by Christie's for the princely sum of US\$107,550. It had belonged to an unnamed private collector since about 1980. What is so intriguing from a zoological standpoint, never to my knowledge previously pointed out in print, is that it clearly depicts a blue-and-yellow macaw, *Ara ararauna*. This is a readily recognisable parrot species native to South America – a continent whose very existence (let alone that of its indigenous fauna) was not discovered by the West for another 1,300 years.

So how can this anachronistic anomaly be explained? It is remotely conceivable that the panel has been partially reconstituted in modern times, with a South American macaw erroneously added rather than an African parrot. Yet judging from the photograph, it doesn't appear reconstituted in any way – and even if it had been, this would surely have been alluded to in its description. Nevertheless, if we assume that it has not been reconstituted, and that it is neither a fake nor has been misidentified, then we must also assume that the macaw's depiction indicates that Romans were trading with South

America many centuries before this continent was known to Europe.

Worth noting, incidentally, is that whoever wrote the description for Christie's was not well-versed in ornithology, because what they refer to as a pileated woodpecker is actually a hoopoe, what they call a greenfinch is a European roller, and what they term a chaffinch is a goldfinch! Let us hope, therefore, that their dating and authentication were more accurate.

[www.christies.com/lot/lot-a-roman-marble-mosaic-panel-circa-2nd-4205444](http://www.christies.com/lot/lot-a-roman-marble-mosaic-panel-circa-2nd-4205444), 11 Dec 2003; Rafael Nascimento, Facebook comm., 12 Feb 2021.

### MAJOR PERIODICALS ONLINE

When the International Society of Cryptozoology (ISC), the first scientific society devoted to the formal study of mystery animals, folded during the 1990s, one of the inevitable outcomes was that its peer-reviewed scientific journal *Cryptozoology* and its informal *ISC Newsletter* ceased publication. Since then, it has become increasingly difficult to purchase copies of any of the former's 13 volumes and the latter's 46 issues, with examples only rarely appearing for sale in online book stores and auction sites, and always commanding high prices. As a result, many members of today's generation of cryptozoologists have never had access to these exceedingly valuable, scientifically significant publications. Happily, this tragic situation has been rectified by

London-based Isaac Koi, who, after obtaining permission from Prof. Christine Janis, the last Acting President of the ISC, has digitised – and in February 2021 has uploaded online – complete, searchable versions of the entire runs for both journal and newsletter, which can be downloaded and used free of charge. He has also done the same for three other famous cryptozoological periodicals – Rip Hepple's *Nessletter*, Mark Opsasnick's *Bigfoot Abstract*, and George Haas's *Bigfoot Bulletin* – and has mentioned at least two notable American fortean periodicals that he hopes to do the same with in due course. Fingers crossed!

Meanwhile, here are the links to the five mentioned above:

[http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/Cryptozoology%20\(ISC\) Cryptozoology](http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/Cryptozoology%20(ISC) Cryptozoology)

[http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/ISC%20Newsletters%20\(ISC\)/ ISC Newsletter](http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/ISC%20Newsletters%20(ISC)/ ISC Newsletter)

[http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/Bigfoot%20Abstract%20\(Mark%20Opsasnick\)/ Bigfoot Abstract](http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/Bigfoot%20Abstract%20(Mark%20Opsasnick)/ Bigfoot Abstract)

[http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/Bigfoot%20Bulletin%20\(George%20Haas\)/ Bigfoot Bulletin](http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20States/Bigfoot%20Bulletin%20(George%20Haas)/ Bigfoot Bulletin)

[http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20Kingdom/Nessletter%20\(Rip%20Hepple,%20Ness%20Information%20Service\)/ Nessletter](http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20Kingdom/Nessletter%20(Rip%20Hepple,%20Ness%20Information%20Service)/ Nessletter)



# MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Sex party mix-ups, a fury false alarm, and the strange case of the woman the French authorities insist is dead

## LEGALLY DEAD

Jeanne Pouchain has spent three years trying to prove she is alive after having been declared dead by a French court in 2017. A 2004 industrial tribunal had ordered Mme Pouchain, 58, to pay a former member of staff at her cleaning company £12,500 in damages. As the case was against her company and not her personally, the ruling was never enforced. In 2009, the employee sued again, but the case was thrown out of court. In 2016, believing Mme Pouchain dead, an appeal court ordered her son and husband to pay the damages instead. The following year, the employee informed the tribunal that letters to her former boss went unanswered and that she must therefore be dead. Mme Pouchain was erased from the official records.

"I have no identity papers, no health insurance, I cannot prove to the banks that I am alive... I'm nothing," she said. "I went to see a lawyer who told me it would be quickly resolved as I had been to my doctor who certified that I was very much still alive. But because there had been a [legal] ruling, this wasn't enough."

As her lawyer sought to have her officially resurrected, Mme Pouchain accused the former employee of inventing her demise in an attempt to win damages from her heirs. However, the employee's lawyer counter-argued that Mme Pouchain had pretended to be dead in order to avoid paying the damages. *Guardian*, 12 Jan 2021.

## SWINGING AFFAIRS

A sex party in Argentina was raided by police for breaching lockdown regulations when a disgruntled swinger who hadn't been invited called police to inform them about the event. Twenty couples had paid organisers for a "sexual tour" including accommodation, meals and "several nights of fun", to be held at a farm in Sierra de Los Padres, 250 miles (400km) south of Buenos Aires. Unfortunately, when police interrupted the proceedings on



ABOVE LEFT: Jeanne Pouchain grapples with the paperwork from Hell. ABOVE RIGHT: MEP Jozsef Szajer: caught with his pants down.

8 January at around 10pm, they were mistakenly thought to be performers.

"When they saw us, they thought we were part of the show. [They assumed] we were strippers," said one officer. One woman who was at the event reportedly stopped an officer as he entered the building, telling him he had "lovely eyes" and made her "feel hot". All the guests were cited for breaches of Argentina's current epidemic containment rules, and the organiser is expected to have to pay a significant fine.

Such cases of mistaken identity are not uncommon. In 2016, PCSO Mike Ober checked a social club in Bradford-on-Avon and was greeted by a group of women who "went wild with excitement" because they thought he was a stripper. In December 2020, police trying to break up an all-male sex party in a room above a Brussels bar were mistaken for part of the entertainment and were propositioned by several guests. The Brussels 'daddy orgy', in which some of the 30 men "tried to unzip the pants of the policemen because they thought that the raid was part of the orgy", was also notable for the presence of anti-LGBT Hungarian MEP Jozsef Szajer, a married conservative politician who allegedly tried to escape by climbing through a window and along a gutter after police arrived. Officials say he was found with

drugs in his backpack, but Szajer denied this: "The police said they had found ecstasy pills. They were not mine. I know nothing of who put them there and how," he said in a statement. He was carrying no ID, so police followed him back to his apartment where he showed them his passport and claimed diplomatic immunity.

Organiser David Manzheley complained of rough treatment by Belgian police: "Suddenly my whole living room was full of cops," he told reporters. "They immediately started shouting: 'Identity card! Now!' But we weren't even wearing pants, how in God's name could we quickly conjure up our identity cards?" Guests at Manzheley's parties undress on arrival, some of them donning fetish gear, he explained. "We have Christmas coming. People are thirsty for meetings... guys in the gay community are searching for solutions to meet. We don't sit around drinking tea. People are here for sex."

Manzheley said he sometimes has 100 guests at his parties, including politicians from Poland, Hungary, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Spain and Ukraine. Usually such orgies are entirely legal, but police shut this one down because it was breaking lockdown rules. Manzheley suspects police were tipped off by a rival sex party organiser.

Szajer was regarded as Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban's strongest voice in the



European Parliament, and an ally for over 30 years. Orban's Fidesz party has positioned itself as a bastion of Christian family values, claiming to defend them against Western Europe's liberal culture. It opposes equal rights for gay people. Ferenc Gyurcsany, leader of Hungary's DK opposition party, accused the ruling party of hypocrisy: "While Fidesz politicians are teaching us about Christianity, family, traditional gender roles and morality, they are actually living a completely different life, as far away as possible from the values they voice." *independent.co.uk*, 2 Dec; *D.Mail*, 4 Dec 2020; *D.Star*, 12 Jan 2021.

## ROBOCAT

University of Roehampton associate professor Alan McElligott was putting some old clothes into a donation bin when he heard a 'miaow'. He called police, who thought there might be two cats inside the container and suggested dropping in some cat food, in case the cats had been trapped for some days. When firemen came to rescue the cats, opening the bin with heavy tools, they instead found a battery-operated FurReal Friends toy. "It was activated by touch, so after I dropped an old pair of shoes [on it], it started making noises," said the embarrassed academic. Dr McElligott is a senior lecturer in animal behaviour. *[UPI]* 5 Oct 2020.

# M is for mantis and missile

NIGEL WATSON surveys the latest sightings and ufological news from around the world

## EVIL PRAYING MANTIS

Paul Froggett saw a strange light in the sky at 5am on 16 July 2020 as he was returning home after a 12-hour shift at a dog food warehouse. The glowing orange sphere seemed to follow him as he cycled through the Oakwood and Blacklow Spinney woods in Warwickshire, and the usual early morning bird song went silent. Turning a bend, he encountered a 7ft- (2m) tall, green-coloured creature that stood on two legs and looked just like a praying mantis. It had a triangular head and its large black eyes stared directly at him. In this moment Paul felt the alien transmitting thoughts of pure evil into his mind. When it seemed as if it was about to pounce at him, he was able to break the hypnotic spell and escape its clutches. His fellow workers were not impressed by his story and cruelly dubbed him the 'Mantis Man of Warwick'.

The *Daily Star* revealed this story as an 'exclusive', so this is far from being an impeccable source. If true, it might be that the 26-year-old man had a momentary hallucination caused by sleep deprivation. If it was a 'real' alien entity, perhaps it was trying to punish him for working in a dog food warehouse.

Whatever the reality, this does highlight the potent image of the praying mantis in popular UFO culture. The iconography of the mantis was of central interest to the Surrealist movement, as the courting ritual of the insect – the female eats the male during or after intercourse – represented the concept of repressed erotic violence. The French sculptor Germaine Richier (1902-1959), for example, created allegorical figures of hybrid insect/human beings (1946) to represent creatures of the night and the restrictions put upon women by society. Certainly, the praying mantis is the stuff of nightmares and something you would expect to emerge from a flying saucer or orange sphere. *Daily Star*, 30 Jan 2021; [www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/horror-dog-food-worker-23404598](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/horror-dog-food-worker-23404598).

## FIREBALLS GALORE

Just a couple of hours before the end of February, a huge fireball meteor descended over the UK. It was witnessed by hundreds of people as far afield as Scotland, Cardiff, London, Liverpool, Manchester, Rochdale, Birmingham, Bath, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, and several video cameras captured the event. As it broke into fragments it presented an incredible display; as one person stated, it "was like a firework", and



some witnesses reported a rumbling or sizzling sound and, in some instances, a sonic boom. The UK Meteor Network was quick to note that this was "simply a bright meteor streaking across the sky" and they record a half a dozen such events a year. Experts concluded it probably originated from an asteroid and fragments might have landed in an area northeast of Cheltenham.

Numerous sightings and videos were also made of a meteor breaking up over the Punjab area of Ludhiana, India, at about 9pm on Thursday 25 February, and around 9.45pm on 27 February a similarly spectacular meteor was seen to the south of Paris and, an hour later over Ankara and Trabzon in Turkey.

Such concentrations of sightings have naturally inspired talk of UFOs; the notable difference here is in the number of witness reports along with good doorbell, security and dash cam footage – something that does not happen even when UFO witnesses say they have spotted a vast flying saucer moving over populated areas. *International Meteor Organisation*: <https://www.imo.net/>

## UNIDENTIFIED CRUISING MISSILE

American Airlines flight 2292 was over New Mexico en route to Phoenix, Arizona, at 1pm on Sunday 21 February when the pilot reported seeing a "cruise missile type of thing" pass over them. The pilot of the

LEFT: *Mantis* (1959), one of Germaine Richier's hybrid insect/human sculptures on display in Antwerp.

Airbus A320 was overheard speaking to the Albuquerque Air Route Traffic Control Centre by Steve Douglass, an amateur radio interceptor. As this occurred in the vicinity of White Sands Missile Range, this was initially regarded as the source of the object, but no test notifications were made and they do not normally operate on a Sunday. Another theory was that it was a Learjet flying at a higher altitude, eight miles away, but this does not fit with the timing of the pilot's radio message. Otherwise, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic controllers did not see any other objects in the area on their radar screens. It is hoped the FAA will release more information about this incident in the future. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7659655/american-airlines-ufo-flight-audio/>; [www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/39441/faa-releases-statement-on-airliners-encounter-with-unidentified-object-over-new-mexico](http://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/39441/faa-releases-statement-on-airliners-encounter-with-unidentified-object-over-new-mexico)

## ENTERTAINING ALIENS

Tom DeLonge's 'To The Stars Academy' (TTSA) in its latest report filed on 17 February 2021 to the US Securities and Exchange Commission, notes: "To achieve its goals, TTSA has decided to restructure its operations to scale back its initiatives in science and tech commercialization and to place a greater emphasis on the operations of its entertainment business."

This is given as the justification for dropping advisors Luis Elizondo, Stephen Justice and Christopher Mellon, and to focus more on films, books, TV and merchandise. They are obviously following the money rather than the evidence; not a surprise to anyone who has followed the TTSA story (FT361:28 and *passim*) and its naive aim to find ET evidence and force disclosure from the US government.

## UFO WEEK

The UK Blaze TV channel launches a 'UFO Week' starting on 22 March. This includes a mind-boggling selection of one-offs and series that include *Alien Autopsy: The Search for Answers*, *Aliens at the Pentagon*, *Hunt for the Skinwalker*, *Ancient Aliens*, *The Flatwoods Monster: A Legacy of Fear*, *Alaska Mysteries Unsolved*, *Alien Chronicles*, *UFO Hunters* and many more. As might be expected, plenty of the usual suspects, but some, like *Alien Autopsy*, look to be worth a watch. If you miss them during UFO Week they are available on catch-up for 30 days; and on 21 April look out for *The Curse of Skinwalker Ranch*.

# The art of saucery

JENNY RANDLES looks back at half a century of attempts to render the UFO experience in images

Between 1975 and 2019 (with a bit of a gap for other commitments) I edited a magazine called *Northern UFO News (NUN)*. Only around 200 copies went out each month, mostly free to UFO groups around the world to share data. It was a very far cry from *Fortean Times*: handmade and intended merely as a link between local groups who had formed an alliance, it was a way of updating independent teams in multiple cities coordinated by that Northern UFO Network. We shared research and pooled resources in a time when there was no Internet to help. There were many such groups then, as the space age inspired us to gaze skyward and wonder.

I 'retired' *NUN* just before the pandemic on reaching issue 200 (though issue 201 may appear one day), but I wanted to explain its modest aims as, by chance, it charts decades of UFO history. Looking back on this labour of love one thing strikes me – the relationship between UFOs and art that the magazine embodied by inviting readers to create covers. While several regulars did this, a few got submitted by witnesses, and I came to appreciate their efforts. These people had seen the impossible and struggled to persuade others it was real. Most had no visual evidence, as mobile phone cameras were pure science fiction back then, so they resorted to the next best thing: sketching what they saw, often crudely but from the heart. Indeed, UFO report forms still encourage witnesses to draw what they saw. These reluctant witnesses were desperate to depict what changed their life in a flash. Yet, looking back, these images revealed another relationship.

Of course, UFO art did not start with the arrival of flying saucers. Oddities have appeared in the sky for as long as humans have gazed upward. Once terrifying visions are now understood as meteors or weather events, but long ago they were often interpreted as religious signs; these days, we may also ascribe them to more alien deities. All of these are simply human responses to the unfamiliar and our need to explain the unknown. From images on cave walls by prehistoric humans showing animals encountered while hunting for food to visions of signs and wonders in mediæval skies, the intent is much like that behind the modern-day witness sketches made by stunned humans: to visualise the impossible, because while these people know what they saw, proving it to a disbelieving society requires evidence. We try to recreate the



unimaginable because others were not there to see it; an illustration strives to vindicate the awe and wonder, and perhaps to persuade ourselves that we really did see something marvellous.

With this in mind, I looked at those 200 issues of *NUN* to see how ufology was depicted in its pages. One of my favourite illustrations came from regular contributor John Watson at a time when talking scarecrow *Worzel Gummidge* was a regular on TV. In 1981, John used the exchangeable heads concept from the stories to depict the different ones a ufologist might 'wear' depending on how they approached the subject. A cobweb in the 'decent new case' shelf 40 years on still seems apt.

UFO imagery itself morphs with the ages, from a lovely Johnny Waudby ink cover of Ken Arnold seeing the first 'saucers' over the Cascade Mountains through many by my co-investigator Roy Sandbach showing how aliens were visualised. However, I was intrigued by witness imagery, and one case in particular grabbed my attention.

Sometimes a witness was unable to draw what they had seen in anything but crude form so one of our artists did it for them, a bit like a crime scene reconstruction. The result when Bill Callaghan did this with one small story was to visualise what the stunned witness had never been able to do.

The witness who contacted me (I'll call him David) in this long-forgotten case was 20 when the events took place in the summer of 1967, a year when UFOs were vying with hippies for pop-cultural domination. This man's life was changed in a moment as he was returning from a night shift at a factory in a northern town. As David told us, it was a lovely warm morning in the 'Summer of Love'. He left work at 6am and walked home in the pre-dawn light. He noticed three lights in the sky that he assumed were a plane,

LEFT: Bill Callaghan's illustration of David's encounter.

though he was baffled by the lack of noise in the very quiet surroundings. Then he noticed that the sky itself looked odd: there were no stars directly above his head.

Several things now hit home at once. It was as if the world had stopped breathing and was in freeze frame. David was experiencing the 'Oz Factor' (a term I had not even coined at that time, but one that witnesses had reported throughout UFO history). Over his head he could now make out a dark circular shape obliterating space from his view along with all ambient noise. "It was so low I could have hit it with a stone," he told us. But, of course, he did not do so given the 'magic spell' that witnesses are under. Within seconds he found himself inexplicably running forward trying to get nearer, calling into the empty sky: "Welcome to our world!"

Needless to say, he quickly realised how odd his behaviour was, but he was caught in the amazement of the moment. Unperturbed, the object drifted away silently toward the horizon, looking like a "great silver pan – stained and pitted." A moment in time had changed his perception of the Universe. David reached home, got into bed – quietly, as his wife and baby were asleep – and as he did so felt all the sounds of the night fade again. This time, he was unable to move and a strange voice was telling him: "You have a great secret." Understandably scared, he fought to free himself, feeling his heart pounding as normal dawn sounds returned alongside a sulphurous smell. He was too afraid to fall into a deep sleep, yet much of the next 12 hours vanished from his memory. Then normal life returned. For the next 20 years David told almost nobody about what had happened; who would understand? He wanted answers, but sadly we had none to give. The story inspired that cover from Bill Callaghan, which at least sought to visualise this moment that changed David's universe.

UFO research is littered with half-told tales, mirrored in artwork, that never get resolved. It would be nice all these years on to update this story. Yet, sadly, as far as I know, there is no sequel – although I quietly hope that David retained his curiosity. Maybe, more than half a century on, he has more to tell. Perhaps he is a reader of a more widely-read magazine – this one – and might get in touch... If so, that cover drawing might yet work its magic.

# THE BATTERSEA POLTERGEIST

DR CIARAN O'KEEFFE takes a fresh look at a 'cold case' that has baffled investigators for decades. Between 1956 and 1968, a normal family home at 63 Wycliffe Road in Battersea, south London, became the centre of an astonishing and frequently terrifying array of phenomena focused on a 15-year-old girl called Shirley Hitchings. Could this be Britain's best poltergeist case?

"It was as though there was a presence watching you all the time, that it, he was there..."

Shirley Hitchings

I've spent a 30-year career being enthralled by parapsychological phenomena, with a particular focus on investigating after-death communication, both within an experimental context and with research in the field. This split between experimental work and fieldwork is mainly due to my early fascination with the paranormal and my later career taking two paths – one as a parapsychologist, a scientist researching the natural explanations for haunting and poltergeist experiences, the second as a 'ghost-hunter', spending any available weekends sitting in the dark in haunted locations, soaking up the atmosphere and exploring the possible origins of eyewitness accounts. As a 13-year-old, having just seen *Ghostbusters*, I dreamed of picking up a phone and shouting "We got one!"

In the midst of the lockdown of 2020, I was presented with an account of a poltergeist case that started in 1956 in a normal family home in Battersea, London, where the activity focused on an adolescent girl who was 15 years old at the time the events began. Becoming involved with this poltergeist 'cold case', I felt like that exuberant 13-year-old ghostbuster: this one had everything. It was a smorgasbord of phenomena that stretched across all areas of parapsychology (see panel): objects moving, flying, levitating, stolen, disappearing and reappearing; loud banging and incessant knocking; people levitating; anomalous scratches; apparent telepathy; sudden darkness (in daytime); bedsheets being pulled; direct communication (verbal and written); spontaneous fires; unexplained lights; precognition; claims of reincarnation;

## KNOCK, KNOCK ! It's Shirley's poltergeist . . .

By ELIZABETH FEW

I TALKED to 15-year-old Shirley Hitchings's poltergeist in knocking language yesterday.

I did it in her 79-year-old Grandma Hitchings's upstairs parlour in Wycliffe-road, Battersea.

Shirley's trouble started three weeks ago. A mysterious key arrived on her bed. It fitted nothing, belonged nowhere.



LEFT: A contemporary article on the case in the *Daily Express*. FACING PAGE: Shirley Hitchings holding the picture of actor Jeremy Spenser that was claimed to shed tears (see p36).

were all gonna die, that something horrible was gonna happen to us with all this going on, and we were all really scared. Scared out of our wits, I just can't put it into words, but the memories of it as a child, because you know I was a child, I thought this is gonna be the end, we're all gonna die."

## COLD CASE FILES

I started re-investigating the Battersea Poltergeist for a BBC Radio 4 podcast. Writer Evelyn Hollow (a former psychology lecturer and holder of a Masters in paranormal

psychology) also independently re-investigated and we both came together to discuss theories and findings with writer, broadcaster and journalist Danny Robins, who had initiated the entire 'cold case' investigation. In his words: "A couple of years ago I started doing a podcast called *Haunted*, interviewing people who believed they had seen ghosts. And I was introduced to one case that very clearly wouldn't fit a single episode. It was too big. Too weird..."

Since then, Danny had also been conducting his own investigation and had accumulated a wealth of material, including his fascinating interview with Shirley, now 80 years old, and a cardboard box she had stored in her attic for many years. Danny described this as "full of material about the case. It contains her father's diaries, entitled 'Living with a Poltergeist', photographs and newspaper cuttings, and, most usefully of all... the files of the original investigator, a man named Harold Chibbett [see below], which Shirley rescued from his house after his death."

## A SMORGASBORD OF PHENOMENA THAT STRETCHED ACROSS ALL AREAS

sense of presence, and so on.

At times, the case tested my rational scientific perspective. Sometimes it was comical, the phenomena whimsical in nature; at other times, it took on a macabre, menacing aspect. Sixty-five years on, hearing the primary witness, Shirley Hitchings, recount her experiences should capture the mood for even the most sceptical reader:

"We didn't, we didn't know. We didn't know. We didn't know what was happening to us. My nan kept saying whatever it is, it's evil... I think personally myself, I thought that we





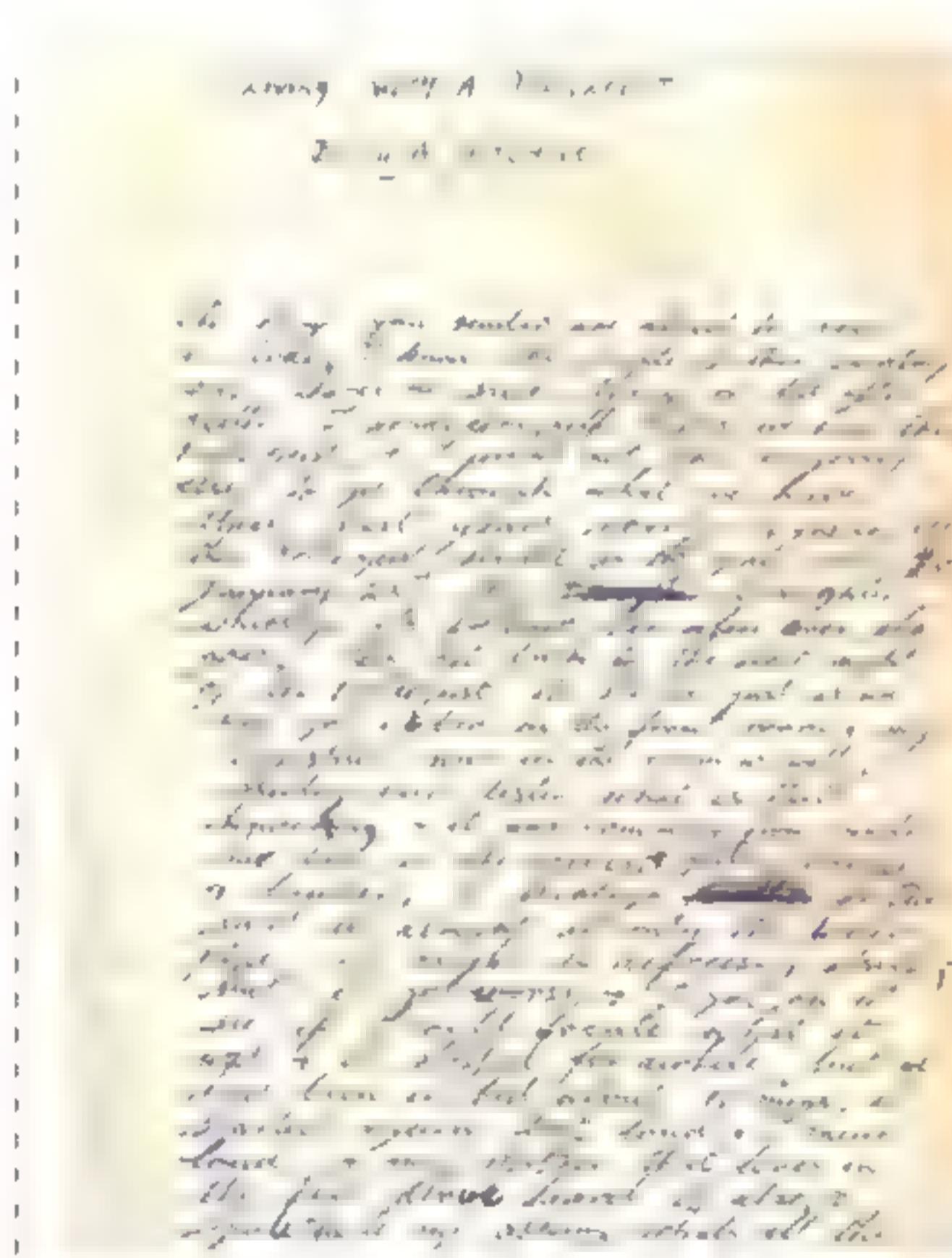
ABOVE: The Hitchings family in the "front room" of No 63 Wycliffe Road in 1957. From left to right: John, Wally, Shirley and Kitty. BELOW: Wally's poltergeist diary.

## BEYOND ENFIELD

Compared to hauntings, poltergeist cases are typically short in duration. The infamous Enfield Poltergeist case (FT32:47-48, 33:4-5) is notable for its length compared to the majority of cases: just over a year, from 1977 to 1978. Surveys on poltergeist cases have consistently found the majority to last approximately five months. Gauld and Cornell (see panel) found that 59% lasted less than a year. The Battersea Poltergeist case lasted 12 years. This long drawn out poltergeist intrusion into one family home resulted in all of those involved suffering from extreme sleep deprivation and other potentially detrimental psychological factors such as anxiety and fear.

The case has some standout features: séances and failed exorcisms, the fall-out from which led to a debate involving the Home Secretary in the House of Commons; a range of physical phenomena experienced first-hand by multiple witnesses from outside the family; the active, and at times obsessive, involvement of a key paranormal investigator; worldwide media fascination, involving salacious, headline-grabbing character assassinations, unethical treatment and horrible set-ups; a spontaneous fire that damaged property, caused serious injuries to a family member and may ultimately, due to the resulting stress, have caused the death of another.

Readers may recall a similarly named 1927-28 poltergeist case which the psychical researcher Harry Price (see FT229:28-34) investigated and wrote about in his book *Poltergeist over England* (1945). He even referred to it at the end of his account as the "Bat-



tersea Poltergeist". This occurred in Eland Road, less than a mile away from 63 Wycliffe Road, the address where, in January 1956, the 15-year-old Shirley Hitchings became the focus for another outbreak of phenomena.

## KNOCK, KNOCK

It wasn't just Shirley's life that was changed by the events that began that year. The rest of the family at 63 Wycliffe Road all featured throughout the case. As well as Shirley, there was her dad, Wally (in his 40s), a driver for London Underground, and her mum Kitty (slightly older than Wally) who suffered from severe arthritis. Ethel (Kitty's mother), a

devout Catholic known locally as 'Old Mother Hitchings', whose deeply held religious beliefs played a key role in her interpretations of who, or what, the poltergeist was, and her adopted son John (a surveyor in his 20s) also lived in the house.

The phenomena started off quite innocently one morning, in late January 1956, with the appearance of a key. Shirley remembered the incident:

"Okay, well, when it started, it was an ordinary day and I got up in the morning, I was home from school because I was on the school holidays, waiting to go to start art school in three weeks' time. And I got up and went out to the kitchen to get my breakfast... I... went back to make my bed and on the pillow was this elaborate key and it was ornate, you know, it had sort of curly bits on it and it looked old, so I picked it up and... it was silver and what I can remember it was about four inches long. And it was, it had the key bit you know, you put in the lock, but the top of it where you hook it up to or that, it was quite ornate. Sort of curly, it had swirls on it and curls and I'd never seen it before."

"So I picked it up, took it out to my father who was washing up and doing things in the kitchen. I said, 'Look, dad, I found this on the bed, where's it come from?'... He said, 'Well, I've never seen one like that.' He checked all downstairs, all our cupboards, and then he went up and checked nan's flat and all her drawers and cupboards. It never fitted anything we had in the house. He said, 'No, oh, that's a mystery.' He put it back on the shelf. He said, 'Don't worry your head about it if it

# PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND THE POLTERGEIST

Parapsychology is defined, very broadly, as the scientific study of the paranormal. It is concerned primarily with three categories of study: 1) *Extra Sensory Perception* (ESP) covers telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance; 2) *Psychokinesis* (PK) is the alleged ability to affect or interact with physical material with your mind (examples include bending spoons, movement of objects, apports, and levitating tables); 3) *After Death Communication* (ADC), an area of study concerned with evidence of survival after death (through, for example, apparition encounters or communicated messages from spirits via mediums, or related areas such as reincarnation and Near-Death Experiences). It is often referred to as *survival research* and typically covers all manner of haunting experiences (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and a sense of presence) in addition to examining the claims of mediums (who produce predominantly spoken messages but also physical phenomena such as object levitation and spirit materialisation).

The three categories are not mutually exclusive – certain phenomena in one category can occur in others. It is one of the reasons why parapsychologists also use the term *psi* to refer to many types of psychic phenomena which remain unexplained by established physical principles. For example, the alleged ability to predict the future is termed precognition and the vast majority of evidence within a parapsychology context comes from prophetic dreams. This ESP ability, however, has multiple layers of anecdotal and experimental evidence. A research area over the last few decades, for example, has explored the unconscious physiological response to future events, known as *presentiment*; this has a link to another area of research, DMILs (or *Direct Mental Interaction with Living Systems*), which is akin to the ability of a person (referred to as an "agent") to interact with, or affect, another person's physiology (referred to as the "target"). So rather than solely an ESP ability it could be viewed as a PK-type ability.

Another example, *poltergeist phenomena*, would typically appear in the third category (ADC) and perfectly illustrates a form of after death



communication, with researchers proposing that characteristics indicative of poltergeists – objects moving, loud bangs, people levitating – are actually caused by a spirit. Other parapsychologists, however, propose that such phenomena are manifestations of subconscious psychokinesis, even terming poltergeist phenomena as instances of RSPK (*Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis*). According to some parapsychologists, this "poltergeist effect" is the outward manifestation of psychological trauma. Indeed, the originator of this "psychological dysfunction" theory back in the 1930s, Nandor Fodor, advanced the idea that poltergeist disturbances were caused by human agents suffering from intense anger, hostility and sexual tension. Fodor successfully supported his theory in several cases, including the famous "Thornton Heath Poltergeist" which he investigated in 1938.

Later, another parapsychologist, William Roll, widely discussed the psychological dysfunction theory (publishing in the 1960s his analysis of 116 worldwide written reports spanning four centuries),

also stimulating debate around the profile of the human agent (typically female and in her adolescent or teenage years). Since then, parapsychology has largely viewed poltergeist activity as either being caused by spirits or caused by some sort of psychokinetic force.

Poltergeist cases are characterised by their physical phenomena, mischievous and often damaging or harmful. The *Parapsychological Association* defines a poltergeist, in terms of its phenomena, as follows: "A disturbance characterised by bizarre physical effects of *paranormal* origin, suggesting mischievous or destructive intent: these phenomena include the unexplained movement or breakage of objects, loud raps, the lighting of fires, and occasionally personal injury to people; in contrast to a *haunting*, the phenomena often seem to depend upon the presence of a particular living individual, called the "focus," frequently an adolescent or child; and *apparitions* are rarely seen." (Parapsychological Association, *Glossary of Psi*)

Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell, in their classic text *Poltergeists* (1979), analysed 500 cases from 1800 to the 1970s. They identified 63 general characteristics and subjected the data to factor analysis in order to establish whether any characteristics group together. At first glance, the data seems to support the contention that women are the primary agents (in 143 cases where an agent appears to be the centre of the phenomena, 29% were female, 11% were male, 60% no clear agent); yet Gauld and Cornell dispute the psychological dysfunction theory, also recognising that it is misleading to distinguish between hauntings and poltergeists. In terms of the characteristics they identified, they included the following: 64% involved the movement of small objects; 58% were most active at night; 36% involved movement of large objects; 16% featured communication between the poltergeist and agent. In addition, there is the overarching proposition that before the 19th century, poltergeist activity was blamed on the Devil, demons, witches, and ghosts. The Gauld-Cornell analysis found only 9% of the cases attributed to demons, 7% to witches, and 2% to spirits of the dead. Most of the demon and witch attributions occurred in non-Western countries.

goes on your bed again,' he said, you know, and we forgot it.

"But that night, the banging started..."

It is not unusual to have knocking sounds in poltergeist cases. Gauld and Cornell found that rapping/knocking sounds were evident in 48% of cases. These can develop into louder bangs or sometimes take on a communicative aspect, although this is much rarer. This auditory development mirrors the typical slow build-up of phenomena, generally going from smaller, sometimes barely perceptible sounds to loud, highly evident incidents. Eyewitnesses in such cases report initial tapping sounds and even the occasional very small object being thrown by unseen hands. There are exceptions, and the Battersea Poltergeist case was one of them. Neighbours came to the Hitchings' front door on the first and subsequent nights complaining about the loud noises. The family were compelled to call the police and surveyors, desperate to solve the problem. No cause was found and, unfortunately, the initial police involvement resulted in a tip-off to the media; this resulted in a wave of press interest that left the family in a situation akin

to a lockdown.

As Shirley recalled: "I couldn't poke me head out the door because if I went out, you know... I think one time I asked my mum if I could go two doors down to my friend Doreen, and she said 'Yes, go on,' and there were so many, when I went out and had to just walk down the road. I got halfway and all the press were around me, all asking questions: 'Oh hello Shirley'... 'Oh, let's stand there.' They were snapping photographs and I just turned around and ran back indoors in tears and mum said, 'What's wrong?' I said 'Oh, there's

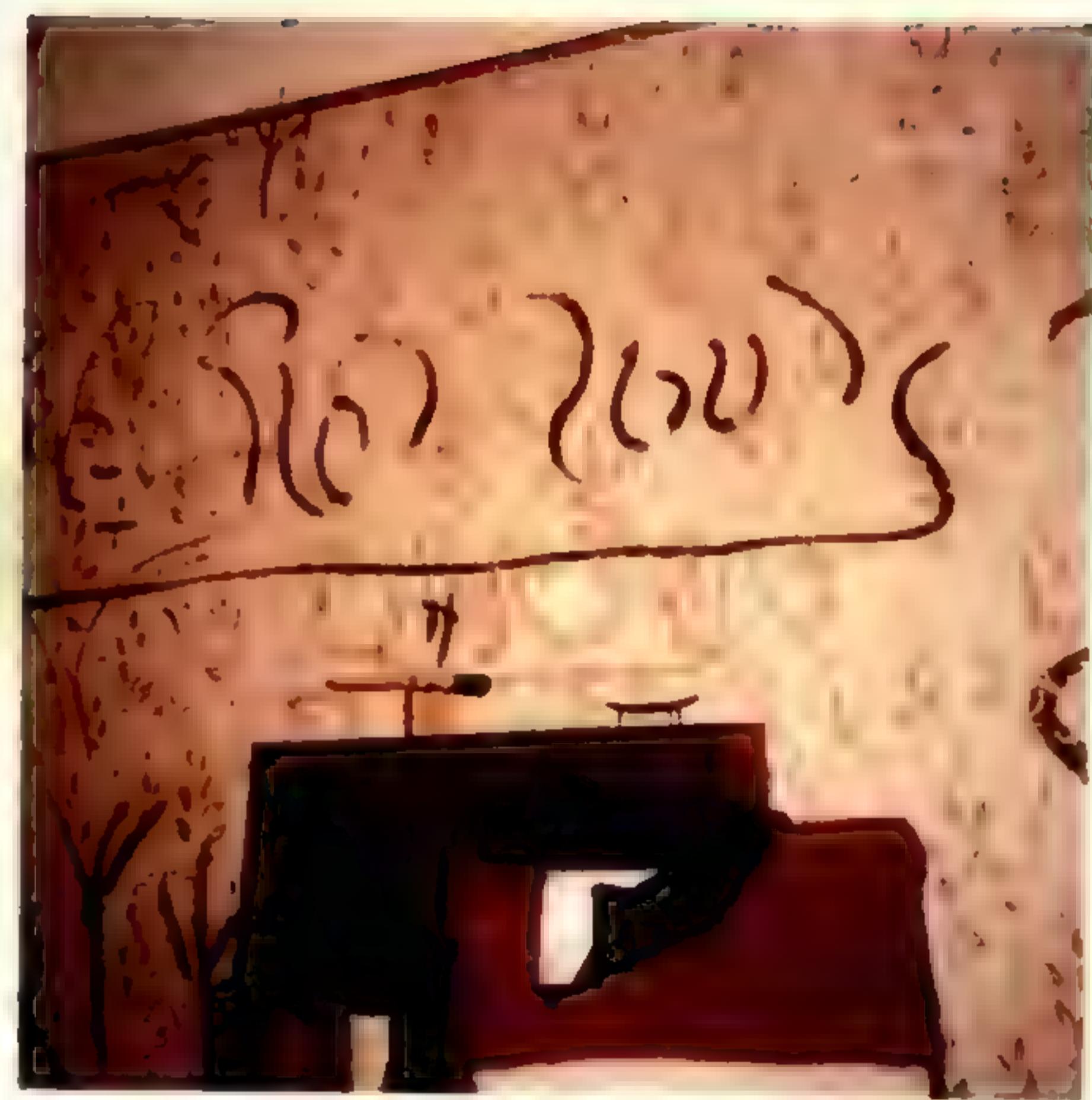
loads of men out there,' and dad went out and I couldn't handle it, you know. I wanted to see my friend and I never got there."

The incessant media circus reached a peak towards the end of February 1956 when a work colleague of Shirley's father named Harry Hanks, a self-professed medium, conducted a séance in an attempt to exorcise the poltergeist. There appeared to be no concern for the psychological impact of such an event on a young girl. Local police interrupted the séance, concerned that 'Black Magic' was being practised: the result was the aforementioned Commons debate. Within a few days of the séance, there were hundreds of newspaper articles worldwide, as well as extensive reporting from the leading UK-based newspapers at the time and the various news programmes which televised the séance (largely in the form of recreations). Shirley even appeared on the BBC the night before the séance, recounting her experiences to a prime-time audience.

For weeks, then months, the family had to



ABOVE: The exorcism. Medium Harry Hanks sits in the centre, with Shirley and Wally on the right. TOP: An article from the *Daily Sketch*, 23 February 1956.



PHOTOS COURTESY SHIRLEY HITCHINGS

ABOVE: Scrawls on the walls of No 63, allegedly made by the poltergeist. Photo taken by Harold Chibbett on 20 March 1964. BELOW: "Shirley I come", the first written message from Donald, found on 22 March 1956.

deal with persistent recurrent phenomena. They were in a constant, heightened state of fear; at night they either huddled together in the kitchen or all bedded down in the same bedroom.

In Shirley's words: "After about a couple of weeks in, things started to fly around the room, things were thrown. Pots and pans that were on the kitchen stove, in the next room, would come flying out the door... floating and go across the room and speed up. Sometimes they would hover and then go down to the floor, other times they'd hit, bang into the wall... the clock [on the mantelpiece] would raise very slowly and then it would glide across from the fireplace to the table... and land on the table, very gently."

### ESCALATION

Eventually, the family attempted to communicate with whatever was causing the activity. The adopted brother came up with the now common suggestion of 'one knock for no and two for yes'. This developed into an alphabetical code. The family also attempted to name the perpetrator. Initially, they called him "Spooky Willie", then settled on "Donald" because he said he resembled one of the Hitchings' neighbours.

At some point, largely due to Ethel's deeply religious beliefs and her insistence on the presence being evil, a vicar came into the house and blessed it with holy water. He also threw it over Shirley despite her protests. Her grandmother said: "That's to rid you of this awful thing". However, this attempt at an intervention had an adverse effect. As Shirley

recalled: "He was very naughty that night. He really was; the bangings and noise was horrendous."

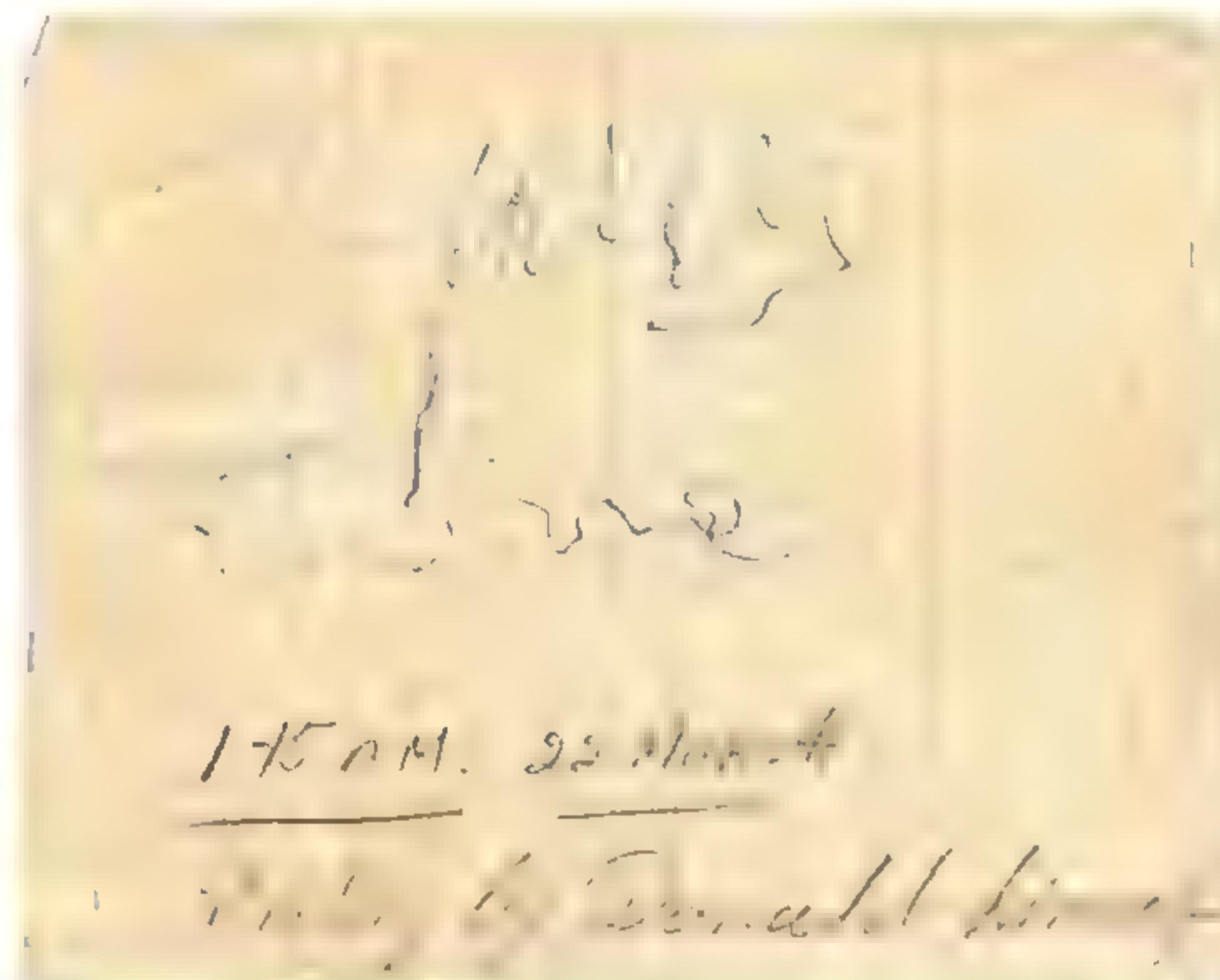
The phenomena appeared to escalate over the first few months and culminated in violence, seemingly in response to situations Donald was not happy with. At times, the poltergeist would demand action or insist on specific things: if the instructions were not obeyed, threats or retaliation followed. Heavy pots and pans would be thrown and gas taps turned on. One night, the family discovered Shirley's quilt had been repeatedly slashed and its innards removed. In other violent incidents, a pair of scissors was thrown at Wally, a screwdriver at another family member, and a boiling kettle overturned, narrowly missing Shirley's feet. At the height of the phenomena, a mysterious fire resulted in an injury requiring hospital treatment. The poltergeist

even tapped out a message following the fire: "You made me angry. I set fire. You can't stop me. You all must die. No escape now..." The family's attempts to communicate and try and appease the aggressive spirit continued when an investigator turned up at the door, a month or so after the phenomena had started.

### ENTER CHIB

Harold Chibbett, or 'Chib', was a tax inspector by day and a dedicated investigator of strange phenomena by night. Indeed, he was a dedicated fortean throughout his life (see FT310:50-51). He had been conducting his investigations for many years, motivated by a desire to prove the existence of life after death through mediumship research. In the 1930s he set up a paranormal investigation group known as 'The Probe'. Although it was months before Chib joined the case, he remained involved for its entire duration, and it is largely due to his records of the Battersea Poltergeist that we have such a well-documented case to study. These records have been wonderfully preserved, together with Shirley's recollections, in a 2013 book by James Clark (co-authored with Shirley) entitled *The Poltergeist Prince of London*. Harold Chibbett's interactions with Shirley and her family also provide wonderful insight into one investigator's approach to the case over a period of many years.

Chibbett persisted with attempted communication, and with that persistence came clues about who 'Donald' possibly was. The narrative that was being built up from the



# DONALD LIVES: EVELYN HOLLOW ON SHIRLEY AND THE MEDIA

They got in touch with me and said: "We're doing a show. We're looking to solve this poltergeist case." When I looked at it, the first thing that jumped out at me was how long it went on for. I had never heard of a poltergeist case going on for anywhere remotely near 12 years. Then also the level of phenomena: it has your usual noises that escalate to objects moving, but then you've also got fires, and the phenomenon isn't confined to the house, it happens outside of the house. You've got multiple reporters, you've got policemen, you've got the fire brigade. The poltergeist case was talked about in the House of Commons, which is absolutely incredible.

When we were doing a slot on *This Morning*, Shirley (pictured at right) was on just before me and the things that people were saying on Twitter... They forgot that Shirley's still alive, she's in her eighties. Imagine saying some of the horrible things that people accused Shirley of, without any bloody information at all, to your grandmother! She lived through this, she thought she was going to die, and she had her childhood basically stolen. Her dad had to leave his job and lost loads of weight because of stress; her grandmother died, I reckon pretty much directly, because of the stress of this case. It destroyed Harold Chibbet's life – he hung his entire career on chasing this

thing about France, about it being the lost Dauphin. It obliterated Shirley's life and everything around her, and to this day there are randoms on the Internet saying that she faked the entire thing.

I don't think people appreciate that there's a real person who is still alive at the centre of this case. I saw lots of people on the live discussion saying: "Oh, I think the family are in on it," or it's the brother, or it's Shirley and they've roped in the other family members. And that Shirley really wants to leave and they're all in cahoots with each other. And I'm like: 'Have you ever tried doing a group project? Even with just four people, trying to get them all on the same page and get them working? It's virtually impossible. And you're telling me that they managed to get a dozen people or more completely in on the same thing, they were all coordinated all at the same time, in a tiny house, for 12 years? That would be more interesting than it being a ghost; that's even more extreme to me.'

In Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* one of the new modern gods is called Media.

When something goes viral or becomes a trending topic, like we were [with the *This Morning* tweetalong], so many people are talking about it, or using the word or the hashtag, it's given power... so viral things almost become gods. Social media is almost a form of prayer or worship; these things go viral... They become memes or they change culture, so they do become, in a way, like digital gods. And that is like a tulpa. Everyone is talking about Donald and giving it attention and giving the case attention, whether they believe or not. But at the level of discussion, it almost creates a digital 'tulpa effect', where they bring him back, he's become an entity, he is out there digitally moving. He's in people's minds.

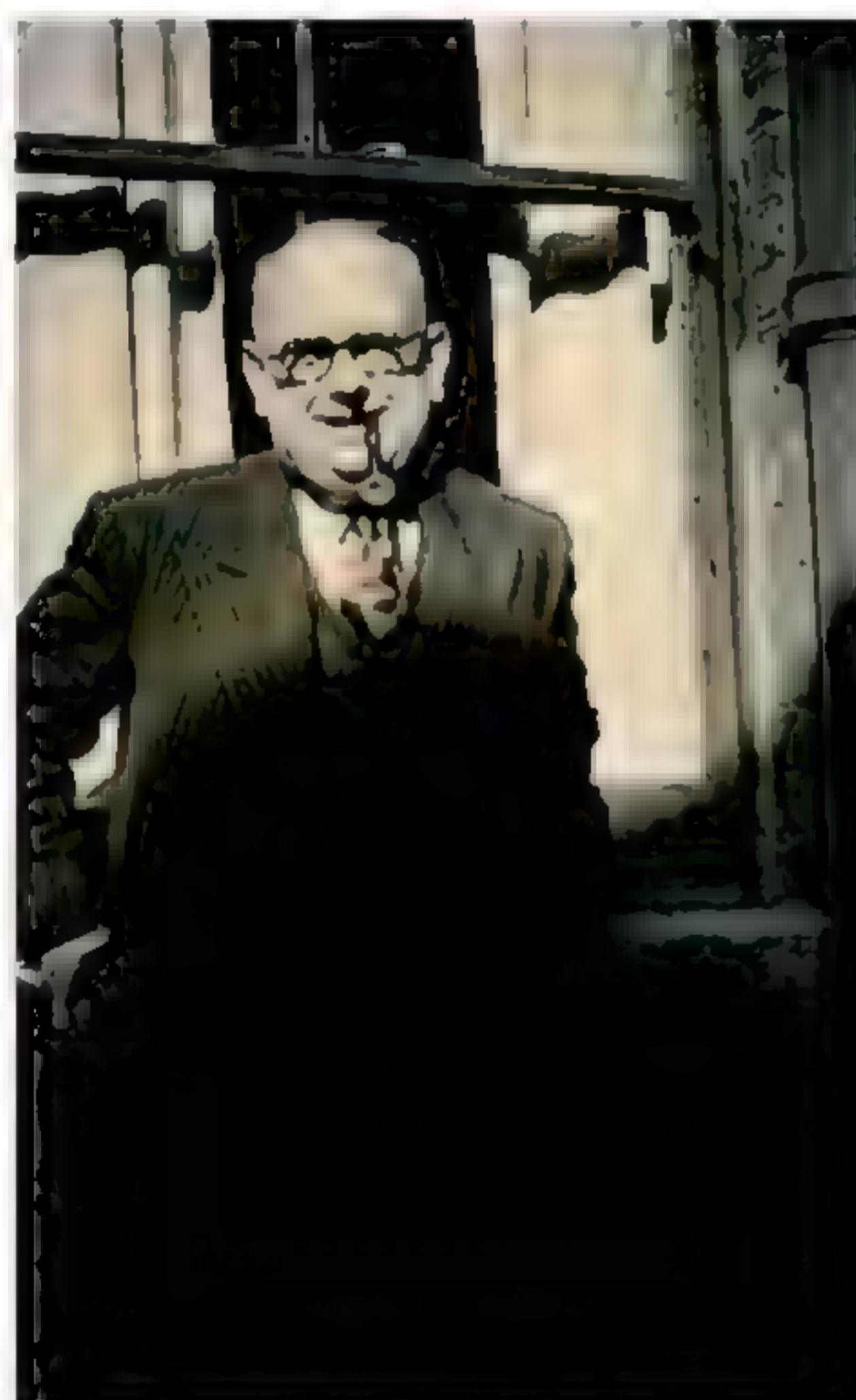
People who said they were scared when they were listening to the show and things were happening in their house. They're going to bed scared. He's still scaring people, without even having to move a single mug across the room."

Courtesy Paul Simpson of Sci-Fi Bulletin: <https://scifibulletin.com/>



communicative knockings started to hint at an actual identity. 'Donald' tapped out "La Manche" (French for the English Channel) and various other significant words. The poltergeist's professed identity then became another path of investigation, especially for Chib, who obsessively dedicated the best part of a decade to establishing it. 'Donald' the neighbour transformed into a royal figure known as the 'Dauphin' (although the family still referred to him as Donald). He claimed to be Louis XVII, younger son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette of France, both guillotined in 1793 during the French Revolution. Louis XVII became Dauphin of France in 1789 on the death of his elder brother, Louis-Joseph.

The French theme manifested in other ways – according to Chib, writing in *Fate* magazine in 1959: "...the sitting room had effectively been commandeered by Donald and was littered with dolls dressed as Marie Antoinette and other royal personages, attired by Shirley under Donald's express directions. Now drawings began to appear on the walls, some of shields with crossed swords superimposed. There were fleur-de-lis on the shields and underneath the words: Roi Louis. Shirley denied having made these drawings. As time went on, more fleur-de-lis appeared on the bedroom



ABOVE: Psychical researcher Harold Chibbett, at the rear of 63 Wycliffe Road, 13 June 1956.

walls, ceilings and elsewhere." (*Fate*, Vol. 12, Oct 1959, pp68-78).

The communication took a different turn when Donald started to produce written messages (scratched onto walls and written on paper). The key moment was when a message was discovered in Chib's notebook, scrawled in almost illegible writing. It said ominously: "Shirley, I come, My Shirley".

Another investigator who was briefly involved in the case – Andrew Green, 'The Spectre Inspector' – even received three letters and a Christmas card through the post from 'Donald', written in a mixed form of French and English. Green raised concerns about how the spirit could purchase stamps, let alone paper, envelopes and a card. Chib also started to receive posted letters apparently directly from Donald and devoted himself in the latter part of the case to establishing proof of Donald's identity.

The case took various fascinating turns from its inception in January 1956 to its gradual decline 12 years later (see timeline, pp32-36). There was even a period where Donald developed a fixation on celebrities; there were recorded instances of apparent precognition in which Donald predicted accidents involving celebrities and also a plane



ABOVE: Danny Robins on Wycliffe Road as it is today. No 63 was demolished in the late 1960s.

crash. In the later years there were different frictions as the Hitchings family struggled to attract lodgers to the upstairs rooms given the continued "presence" of Donald. Prospective tenants quickly declined on hearing about the case, about which Wally felt obliged to inform them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Jacques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, famously said: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players..." This is true of the Battersea Poltergeist – there are so many players it is difficult to entangle who or what is responsible. Let me try.

Normally, I'd say the paranormal explanations for poltergeist activity are simple to understand: it's either a spirit or some form of PK. The complexity of this case lies in deciphering the reasons for the spirit's return – but the sheer number of spirit suspects means there is no clear answer. We have Donald (a nearby neighbour); Shagy Roots; the Dauphin; Miky and Dopy; James Dean; even Spooky Willie and Charlie Boy, although these two were names proposed by the family. There's debate about who 'Donald' actually was, but there's no doubt he takes the lead in the majority of the communications and in professing responsibility for the physical phenomena. If Donald is not a spirit, then he could be evidence of RSPK: some sort of subconscious manifestation of anger or psychological trauma. Any investigation, then, would focus on how this is caused and what the psychological triggers are. Certainly, there are turning points in the case where Donald's involvement prevented Shirley from going to work or impacted on her starting art school, and one could argue that much of Donald's retaliatory and threatening behaviour feels reflective of teenage tantrums. It's clear that Shirley is the focus: if the explanation for the poltergeist is not paranormal, does she remain the focus?

The rabbit hole of non-paranormal explanations is equally fascinating. There could be a "human hand" involved and, again, there could be many players involved. Shirley is a prime candidate, but there are instances where others could be involved. They all have their exits and their entrances, and a number of witnesses report phenomena without Shirley being present. One theory is that, in similar cases, some sort of dissociative state would obscure the protagonist's memory of being responsible for knocking, tapping or other physical phenomena. With multiple witnesses, however, you'd expect there to be countless incidents where the protagonist would be caught faking the phenomena. There are suspicions at various points, but there are also incidents where the phenomena are experienced first-hand by journalists or investigators without them finding any potential origin for the tapping. If you are comfortable with pointing the finger at an initial human protagonist, then how can you explain the witnessing of hundreds of incidents of physical phenomena that occur in that first year?

Could fear play a role here? In haunting and poltergeist cases I say: "Never underestimate the power of fear." The mysterious phenomena, unwanted intruder and increasingly violent outbursts and ongoing intimidation would have fed the fear in this case. The constant danger and anxiety around imagined responses increases the family's physiological arousal (heart rate, blood pressure), constantly gearing them up for fight or flight. This will have played havoc with their physical health, including exacerbating fatigue (they were suffering chronic sleep disruption), but it will also have affected their memory and perception. Recent studies have also shown prolonged fear can reduce tactile sensitivity and also weaken the creation of long-term memories.

Shirley's emphatic insistence on the reality

of the unseen Donald and his responsibility for the incidents could take us into the territory of an imaginary friend acting as a guide in the process of individuation and differentiation and her transition between two major life phases: childhood and motherhood. But then imagination and fallibility of witnessing can only go so far when some of the physical phenomena are scrutinised.

Perhaps one of the key players at various points is the environment. Infrasound could play a role in exacerbating already existing experiences and intensifying the acceptance of an unseen presence in the house, or at least in the misinterpretation of mundane occurrences as paranormal ones. Similarly, some researchers have argued that proximity to water and resultant seepage could have an unsettling effect on nearby buildings, or that seismic activity could cause poltergeist events. But the environment or psychology only go some way to explaining all the phenomena in this case. Environmental or psychological variables do not write letters or scrawl messages on walls.

Should we be considering the case in two parts? Firstly, the initial three to five months (as with typical poltergeist cases) in which the phenomena build to a damaging and violent frenzy. Secondly, the subsequent months and years where the family, and others, receive around 4,000 letters and the investigation turns into Chib's obsession with establishing the identity of the Dauphin?

There is so much to report on a case of this magnitude, both in length and phenomena, that I encourage you to conduct your own reinvestigation while temporarily suspending judgment, even if only for sufficient time to examine the case in full. You could then approach it being aware of all the possible parapsychological theories for the cause of the activity or examine what I feel is an incredibly complex, multi-layered mix of possible natural explanations.

I have attempted here merely to provide a summary of this rich case and I hope I have persuaded you of its merit – perhaps it should replace Enfield as the most famous British poltergeist case. Today, it also remains Shirley's story, a recollection of a particularly traumatic period which ultimately resulted in her losing her teenage years.

With thanks to James Clark, co-author of *The Poltergeist Prince of London*

*The Battersea Poltergeist* is a BBC Radio 4 podcast produced by Bafflegab Productions, written and presented by Danny Robins, and is available on BBC Sounds.

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# THE BATTERSEA POLTERGEIST 1956-1968

## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

**1956**

**27 JAN**

Shirley discovers unknown key on top of her bed. Knocking, tapping and loud noises start at night.

**1 FEB**

Scratching heard together with knocking.

**4 FEB**

Tappings continue, following Shirley from room to room, into the street, onto buses and into her workplace.

**18 FEB**

First object moves (Shirley's glove), hitting Wally in the face. Bedclothes pulled off Shirley's bed. A pair of slippers jump from floor onto table. That night the entire family report seeing Shirley floating above her bed.

**19 FEB**

Shirley places crucifix on the floor of her bedroom. She is thrown out of bed. Rappings so loud the neighbours complain.

**20 FEB**

*Daily Mirror* runs first article about the case. A chair flies through the air. Pencils, clocks, ornaments and a table lamp leap to the ground. Gold bangle disappears. Until now, family refer to poltergeist as 'Charlie Boy' or 'Spooky Willie'; from this date on it is referred to as 'Donald'. Medium, Henry (Harry) Charles Hanks (tube driver, colleague of Wally) visits house to try to rid Shirley of the spirit. First "contact" made with Donald (via knocking).

**21 FEB**

Shirley interviewed live on BBC about her experiences. Tappings continue and follow Shirley to her workplace. Chair overturns in Ethel's room. Mystery key left on sideboard later found on bed.

**22 FEB**

Séance conducted at Stockwell home of Harry Hanks with two other mediums (Ada Roden, Daisy Bennett), in attempt to exorcise the presence. Others present included Mrs Hanks, Shirley and Wally. Police interrupt séance, having received a radio call stating "Black magic is being practised." Harry goes into trance and Harry's 23-year-old daughter shakes convulsively.

**23 FEB**

Shirley taken to a hypnotist by two reporters. Hypnotism not successful. Around 8pm rappings begin. 11.20pm, objects flying around room, photograph in glass frame flies off mantelpiece and hits Ethel in back. Harry takes Shirley away to secret location.

**26 FEB**

Séance held at secret location in evening (Harry, Daisy, Ada plus others). Cold temperature reported.

**28 FEB**

Fire in downstairs bedroom (sheets and eiderdown burst into flames).



ABOVE: Kitty Hitchings outside 63 Wycliffe Road.

**3 MAR**

Noises become so disruptive that Kitty calls police. Shirley's watch disappears. Wally calls out for it to be returned and it falls at his feet. He notices some missing pieces and so threatens to call police unless they're returned. Missing pieces fall at his feet. He notes strap and metal surround still missing, makes threat again and final missing pieces fall at his feet. Later, Kitty and Shirley witness Shirley's bedroom slippers floating three feet off the ground. Message from Donald: "I am 15. I come from France."

**6 MAR**

Harold Chibbett arrives at 63 Wycliffe Road.

**7 MAR**

Shirley wakes up and finds her watch crushed on table beside her. Tapping all day. A clock and two pictures found in front of fire on mat in the kitchen. A ball is seen thrown in air. 'Heavy' scratching.

**8 MAR**

Donald demands further visit from "Kirch" (Michael Kirsch, reporter): "Get Kirch - I like to get Kirch on his own - I'd teach him a lesson - I poke him - I come with message later - I get revenge on Kirch - Suffocate him tonight - Save him if you like - I warn you - get him tonight for safety." Tapping during day, even after Kirsch's uneventful visit.

**9 MAR**

A few taps in the morning followed by a poker on hearth in kitchen being lifted a foot into the air. A gold cross and chain (which had vanished a few days before) discovered hanging on ornament on sideboard. Carpet in middle of room rises about an inch. Basin flies out of cupboard as Shirley is getting biscuits. After bedtime Donald taps out music (family hummed to him). Family give him sums to do and 'he' gets them all right. Bangs and scratches. The bed rocks.

**10 MAR**

Tapping resumes at 9am. A pen belonging to Shirley disappears. Just after midday, money found beneath a chair.

**11 MAR**

Donald taps "Get Maxwell - Kirch is no good." 8.50pm: "I will set house afire if you don't get Maxwell - so take care." Three green balls of light (size of ping-pong balls) seen floating in air momentarily. Ethel hears a match being struck then sees a lit match slowly float through the air towards Shirley. On way down, it slightly singes Shirley's eyebrows.

**12 MAR**

1am, message from Donald: "Get Maxwell - I just given you taste of what I am going to do - so get Maxwell - I warn you no one will stop me." (Ronald Maxwell is a reporter.) Eiderdown and bedcover found on fire in downstairs front bedroom. Wally suffers burns to right hand and arm.

**13 MAR**

Shirley sleeps in Ethel's bedroom. Loud tapping/scratching sounds keep everyone awake. Small objects thrown about. Ethel and Shirley smell burning. Wally finds smouldering 'stain' on landing; another discovered later in kitchen.

**14 MAR**

Aunt Nell has Shirley stay the night. Peaceful day. Nell hears occasional tapping and scratching sounds later in evening.

**15 MAR**

Shirley returns to No 63. Loud tapping. Donald wants Shirley to return to Nell's. She does. No incidents.

**16 MAR**

At Nell's house: Nell uses alphabet system. Donald tells Nell's family not to fear him and that he is there to guard them. Tapping continues. Objects thrown. Bedclothes pulled (Bill & Nell's bed). At No 63, JAC (friend of John's) reports knocking on his bed.

**17 MAR**

Joyce Lewis (reporter *South London Advertiser*) and John Heel (ghost hunter) stay the night at No 63; Shirley sits with hands and feet bound with insulating tape. Hat flies off bookcase. Joyce Lewis goes to bed with Shirley - scraping noise from underneath, bedsheet pulled, icy draught, bedsheets pulled off, perfume smell changes to burning rubber smell, Shirley scratched on leg, loud bang, bed bounces up and down, Joyce's ankle is tickled, Shirley pulled out of bed several times, her big toe tied up with string.

**18 MAR**

Chib asks questions of Donald (via alphabet method). As well as correctly translating 'La Manche', Donald gives various responses to questions: "I will do harm to anyone who don't believe in flying saucers." "I can tell you what you people have not learnt." "You got a long way to go." "I come from the atmosphere."

### 19 MAR

Message from Donald: "I will set fire to Nan's bed in night - I don't joke - ready for fire - you don't think I do it." Tapping and scratching from kitchen table. Electric stove twice found to have been switched on. Wally turns off at mains. Shirley lies on kitchen floor trying to sleep - violent tapping and rings on stove switched on again.

### 20 MAR

Message from Donald: "You made me angry - I set fire - You can't stop me - You all must die - No escape now - I do not kid - Get out of home for tonight I set atomic gas off." Some blue eye make-up goes missing from Shirley's make-up case. Stick of perfume broken and scent fills the house.

### 21 MAR

Tapping continues. Around 10.30 electric stove switched off. Earth thrown at Shirley in yard. Pieces of burnt paper found under table in Ethel's room. Splashes of water found and milk bottle thrown at Shirley in same room. Donald repeats demands for Ronald Maxwell.

### 22 MAR

1.15am: first written message found in a notebook (barely legible in blue ballpoint ink): "Shirley I come... my Shirley." Message from Donald to Shirley (via tapping): "Go in peace to your aunt's house." Donald repeats demands for Maxwell and Kirsch. Message from Donald (tapping): "I tell you in French - get dictionary - Abi is kaem kip keer." Shirley's first peaceful night's sleep in over two months at her Aunt Nell's house.

### 23 MAR

Messages from Donald (tapping): "They will [start a] fire." "Time bomb hidden". "I am going now. They are around." When questioned about who "they" were, Donald replies: "Miky and Dopy."

### 24 MAR

Message from Donald: "I think got rid of them - Miky and Dopy - They gone far from here - They took my power." After demanding presence of "Evans", and the family not complying, Donald messages: "I am go to be bad tonight - ha". "Non[e] will sleep - set fire under floor - you won't [k]now." When asked by Wally "Why did you come to us in the first place?", Donald replies "To destroy house - I won't fail this time." Whistling sounds heard and muffled whispering. Words 'Dauphin' and 'Dolphin' occur in communications, plus reference to 'lost in the Channel'.

### 25 MAR

Muffled whispering. Nell's husband's missing cufflinks reappear. Donald responds 'yes' when asked if responsible for their return. Donald demands (via tapping) that Shirley sleep in Ethel's room. Ethel refuses. Donald (via tapping): "I won't go if Nan don't do as I say - For Nan's disobedience top her out of bed... let's go and get silly old cow up - Silly old bugger - She is old battleaxe - Face like nose overgrown beetroot." Further messages, increasingly rude.

### 26 MAR

More rude messages following Ethel's refusal to let Shirley sleep in her room.

### 27 MAR

Shirley at Maudsley Hospital under scrutiny of psychiatrists. After returning to No 63, Wally and Kitty report a sulphurous smell in kitchen. A large pudding basin is found on table full of water with entire supply of tablets (prescribed at Maudsley Hospital). Series of messages from Donald about people at Drury Lane

Theatre ("Colley Ziber", "Nancy Mainfield", "Sir Richard Steel") and confirms that person tapping was born in 1653, died in 1753 and had been an actor at Drury Lane.

### 28 MAR

Letters written in ball-point pen appear. Donald taps along to music on wireless. Eric Davey, medium, arrives to attempt to drive out poltergeist. Tapping and scratching. Two murmurs. Crying out. Several messages from Donald, including: "Don't do it - me not hurt anyone here." During questioning, Donald replies he is 15 years old and born in 1798. Quiet night once Davey leaves.

### 29 MAR

Shirley's legs tied together with Wally's bandage (from burns) when in bed at night.

### 30 MAR

Mrs WM Durrant (well-known healer) and a medium spend evening at house.

### 1 APRIL

Donald tapping along to music on wireless and television. Talcum powder found sprinkled on top of piano in front room. Marks resembling arrows and flame-like swirls drawn in powder. Message from Donald: "Help me I implore - go to full name of Shirley's childhood friend - I come here to make a link of happiness of two people - make him aware of me - go in room - I tell all about me - I am fifteen - I lost in channel my life I knew [...] I come to link happiness I did not live to enjoy - Write to [location of Shirley's friend] - I want to bring happiness to Shirley - I go when I see Shirley happy with him." Donald messages later that flame-like drawings were a warning that the family should get 'Evans' (reporter).

### 3 APRIL

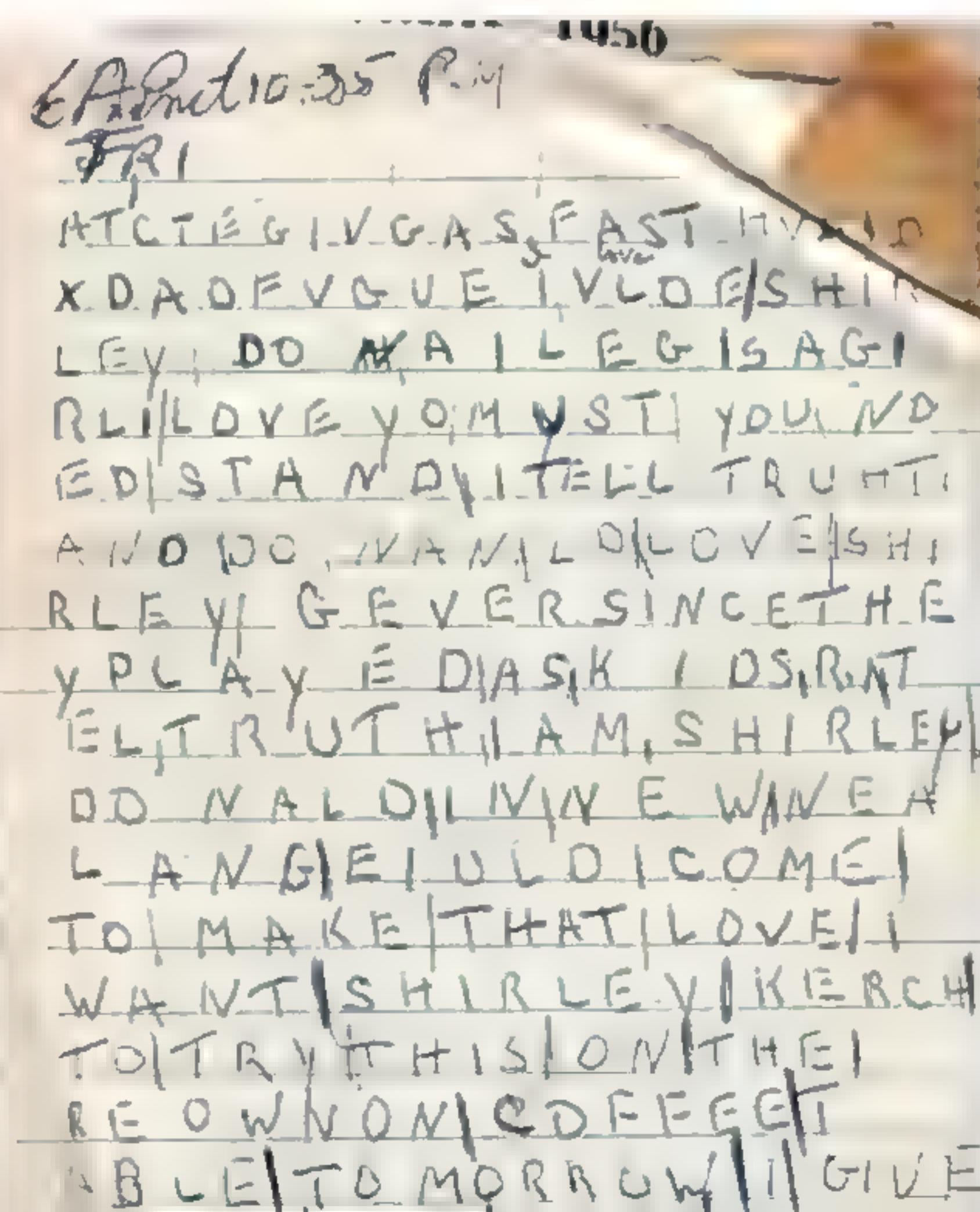
Loud tapping throughout day. At 9.15pm, repeated demand for reporter's visit; if his demands were not met, Donald would "be nautly tonight". After 11pm, Donald taps message: "I talk to you in Marson [Martian]". He then taps out a series of letters: "Gilboart-emnrylchetymaresasrisfdrdkap laietoekeerkim." Banging so loud that family sleep on kitchen floor.

### 4 APRIL

Further demands for reporter (Kirsch) from Donald. Red electric lamp (Chib's) and a torch (Ethel's) both broken.

### 5 APRIL

Tapping throughout day. Two groups of objects found laid out in circles on floor in kitchen. Objects thrown in Ethel's bedroom (water jar, clock, shoes).



### 6 APRIL

Box thrown at Kitty. Further demand for Kirsch. Message from Donald (following Ethel's departure from the room): "Nan has gone - Silly old courps [corpse] - Nut case - Show up to The Court of France." Written message received later. It is a long string of letters that is only later broken up into words.

### 7 APRIL

Message from Donald (via tapping): "Love Shirley - I come to make love between Shirley and Donald - Joyce - I got to give this message to Donald - Donald is not aware of me - I want Joyce to tell of me - Kerch must come tomorrow - Get him you must... This is not like the Palace in France - Shirley must dress like a lady of the Court - Get her dress skirt blouse coat shoes..."

### 8 APRIL

Scratching and banging throughout day. Further demands from Donald for reporter(s). Front room coffee table and chair found turned upside down. Bottle of cleaning fluid found knocked over in scullery.

### 10 APRIL

Donald demands: "Get Kerch - If you [don't] I water throw."

### 11 APRIL

Kirsch arrives. Donald 'refuses' to talk to him. In evening, Donald warns that another entity is present. Family sleeps on kitchen floor. Heavy blowing of wind over Shirley's head. Green paint put on Shirley's legs. Thimble thrown at family.

### 12 APRIL

Wally finds large footprint in talcum powder spilled across floor. Tapping at night keeps everyone awake.

### 13 APRIL

Cinders from fireplace discovered beneath nearby mat. Message from Donald says Shirley would have a peaceful night if she slept in Ethel's room. Objects hurled around room. Ethel leaves No 63 to live with a daughter. Donald demands her return. Wally discovers Shirley's legs are covered in blue paint; used tube found under her sheets.

### 14 APRIL

Message from Donald (via tapping): "Faira shuker, faira shuker, dom avow, selamena ding dong dam." Later, another message: "Good by or shall I say orawar?"

### 15 APRIL

Message from Donald: "I come to tell what I look like - five foot high, fair head, blue eyes, 35 wide".

### 16 APRIL

Messages from Donald concerning life on other planets (Mars, Saturn, Venus) and communications in the language of aliens.

### 17 APRIL

Donald instructs Shirley to write to her childhood friend Donald/Ronald. She refuses and Donald messages (via tapping): "You make me angry." All bedclothes found on floor. Picture on floor. Milk bottle broken in scullery. Two kettles of water emptied over (or near) Shirley. Electric stove and oven turned on and tea towel burned. Sink plugged, tap switched on and sink filled. Scullery window opened, things thrown out.

LEFT: Message tapped out by Donald, taken down on 6 April 1956.

**17-23 APRIL**

Cooker turned off at mains but still comes on. Frequent tapped out messages from Donald – mix of threatening and information-focused. Small items thrown (spectacles, Shirley's make-up). Shirley's washed clothes tipped onto floor. Kettle of water kicked over.

**20 APRIL**

Donald taps out his father's name as "Louie".

**25 APRIL**

Message from Donald (via tapping): "Old Shagy Roots is here – He burn up the house – Be building [h]is self up – I tell truth – I warn you it is no game beleave me – I am here to guard you."

**27 APRIL**

Further demands from Donald for Kirsch. Furniture and objects turned over and piled in the centre of the front room. Tapping and scratching. Tube of paint emptied onto Shirley's arm. Shirley's foot tied tightly up with a sock. Her bedclothes pulled from her bed then her legs smeared with blue then green make-up. One of her dolls thrown to the floor. When Wally demanded Donald stop he taps that it was "Shagy Roots".

**28 APRIL**

Further demands for Kirsch. Message from Donald: "Don't be fools." Shirley returns from local shop to find tea towel burning on electric stove. Smouldering cinders on kitchen floor. Message from Donald: "Get him – Get Kerch – IF not you make me angry – I set fire to your house and Kerch house."

**29 APRIL**

Further demands for Kirsch and Maxwell: "Get Maxwell – I do the same – Fire bed – If you don't get Maxwell then get Kerch – I warn you [...] I mean what I say." Electric cooker's rings switched on (but Wally had switched off mains supply, so no damage). Bedclothes thrown onto floor. Upstairs rooms made a mess (bedclothes pulled back, heavy clocks overturned, ornaments thrown about). Soot strewn across kitchen mantelpiece. In one bedroom, indentation of 5ft-tall person in bed.

**30 APRIL**

Message from Donald: "Get Kerch – If you don't I set fire." Series of fires. Charles and Doris Baker (neighbours) called in to fight fires at 2pm and 8.45pm. Rags on top of a stove were set alight when mains electricity mysteriously turned on. Shirley questioned by London Fire Prevention Dept and CID.

**1 MAY**

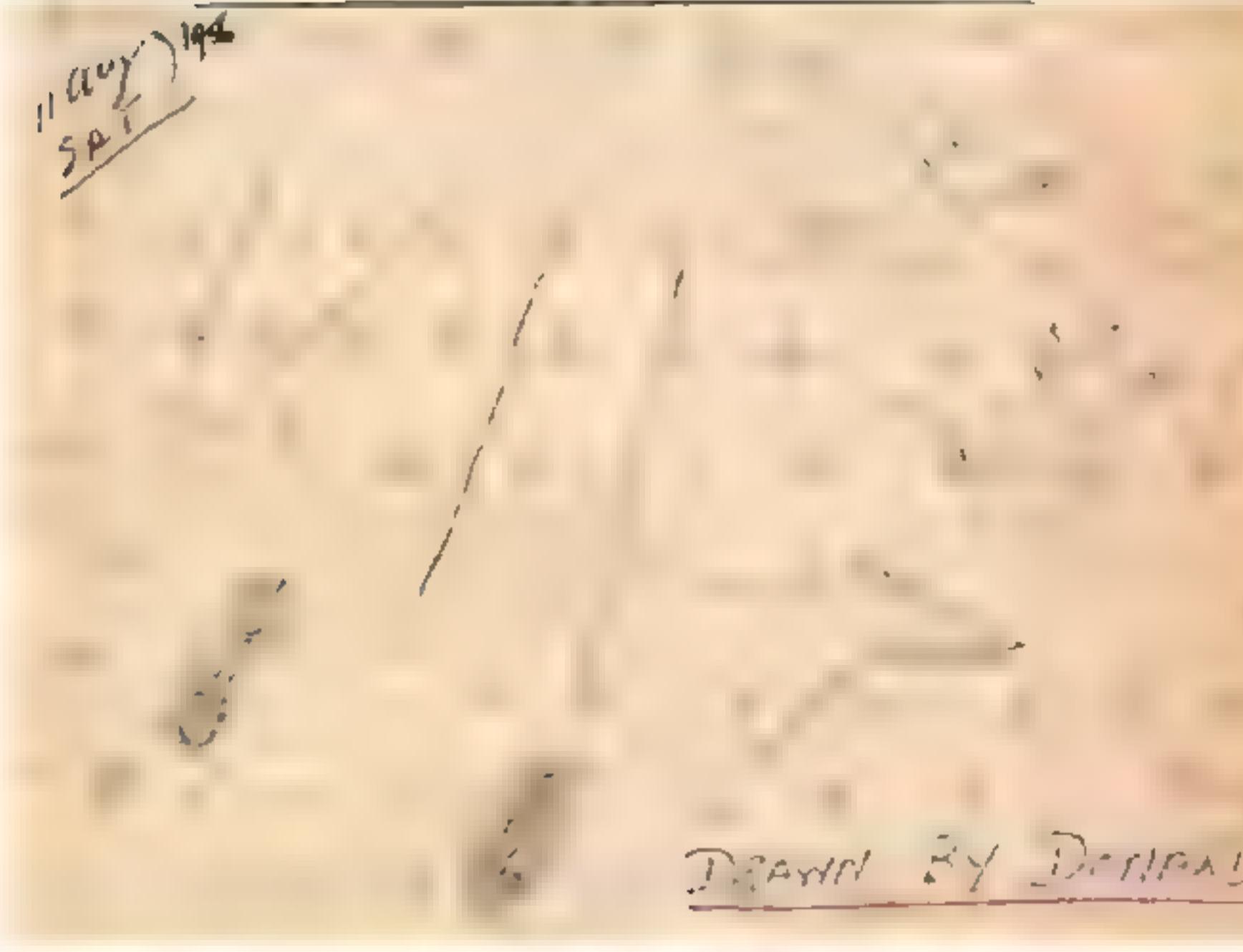
Message from Donald: "If Eric comes again I kill girly." Eric Davey (medium) visits with Kirsch, and puts hands on Shirley's head to drive out Donald. He goes into a trance and says that 'Harpet' (Native American spirit guide) has come to beat Donald into submission. Continued tapping throughout visit.

**2 MAY**

Shirley wakes up to feel a hand on her throat.

**3 MAY**

Insurance company pay Hitchings family £9 for the fire. Cause of fire recorded as: "Due to a poltergeist". Visitors to No 63 report thudding coming from under their feet and one (insurance agent) reports strange knockings in their own home after the visit. Message from Donald includes phrase: "I was the Crown."

**30 MAY**

Three large crosses drawn in black lead appear on bedroom wall, plus one on headboard, one on pillow and one in the bed.

**31 MAY**

Message from Donald: "Do you know what the guillotine was?"

**MAY-JUNE**

Sitting room commandeered by Donald for his own use. Littered with dolls dressed as Marie Antoinette and other royal personages. Drawings begin to appear on the walls (shields with crossed swords; fleur-de-lis, "Roi Louis"). Disappearance and reappearance of money. Donald dictates when family go to bed, and

that Shirley should sleep upstairs, and wakes people by pulling off their bedclothes in morning. Sometimes taps out warnings that someone is lurking in garden and house will be burgled. Tapping to welcome home family members, to accompany music and to prepare family to get paper & pen ready (for more messages).

**2 JUNE**

Message from Donald: "Let us give that doll a French Royal formal name... Oui... let us think... let it be Marie An-toinette, mon de mere name. She must be her for she has a French face. Let me put the flurdeley [fleur-de-lis] on her, because my mother had it branded. Will you dress Marie as I describe: she must have six petticoats, two skirts, a top – you know, her hair all curls, a fan, shoes, the top square neck, long sleeves with lace edges – lots of lace – silk too. If you dress her for me, I get the pleasure. I will help in describing. You can look in pictures. Please do this for me..."

**3 JUNE**

Fleur-de-lis drawings (in black lead) cover walls of downstairs bedroom. Large fleur-de-lis (plus a pair of crossed swords) drawn on front room wall.

**4 JUNE**

Shirley due to start new job, but all new work clothes vanish. Slop bucket tipped over her underclothes. Large crosses drawn (with black lead) in Wally and Kitty's bed. Face towel put on electric stove (removed before it caught alight).

**10 JUNE**

In evening, Shirley's missing clothes found stowed in the piano. Knife thrown from the kitchenette and stuck in the window frame of the dining room. Kettle and pots tied to oven and ironing board. During night, bedclothes disarranged, violent scratching sounds and rappings (as though on metal). Shirley's quilt slashed and internal red flock removed. Shirley spends night in a wicker chair. Pair of scissors thrown at Wally.

**11 JUNE**

While Shirley is getting dressed a screwdriver is thrown at Kitty (in bed). In the kitchen, a boiling kettle is overturned and another narrowly misses scalding Shirley's feet. Shirley's money vanishes. Found later inside a clock. After Shirley's first day at bank, she and friend are nearly pushed onto railway track on way home. Knife thrown at Shirley from scullery; blade stuck in window frame.

**20 JUNE**

Donald leaves sealed envelope for Chib on coffee table in the front room. Inside envelope is newspaper cutting with pencilled words "I forgive Kirsch" and a drawing of the fleur-de-lis. Small dark-blue imprint of fleur-de-lis appears on upper

part of Shirley's left arm and similar imprint on right side of her neck.

#### 24 JUNE

Message from Donald: "Can you fence? It is rare in girls, but I could teach you. I knew how to handle a sword when I was only 10. You had to defend yourself in my day. It was peaceful until the Revolution came."

#### 27 JUNE

Sealed envelope from Donald left on coffee table in sitting room. Local paper inside with ink 'mirror' writing on page 9: "Out in one month. Don't worry, Shirley."

#### 28 JUNE

Message from Donald: "Shirley, when I was young I played with toys. Everyone said I was mad; but I loved my little soldiers, dolls all dressed in scarlet, blue, yellow, gold, silver, black and white. It is not wrong to have a secret – I loved to play with dolls like you. I was sick of being pushed about, of talks with governesses, fencing lessons, dancing. All I wanted was to be free – no state laws. I loved France though, but I was not happy in Court. Boys would take my punishment if I was bad – why couldn't they let me take my own punishment like a man? To hell with the Court of France. That is why I must tell people how lucky they are now – but it is me and people who made it so." Message from Donald about Chib's Lake District holiday (10 days later): "Chibbett – He going to Lake District – But him no see sauser – He might have a surprise though."

#### 9 JULY

JAC (John's friend) hears a series of taps in his own home (and again on 10 and 11 July).

#### 27 JULY

Chib questions (and experiments with) Donald regarding the 'surprise' experienced at the Lake District holiday. All responses correct.

#### 30 JULY

Donald orders Shirley to leave house (because he was due to have a meeting with his 'statesmen'). When Shirley and Kitty return, they find chairs in a room arranged in a circle; books placed on the chairs; material covering the mirrors; smell of tobacco smoke. Similar message tapped out about Donald needing another conference in Ethel's room. Next morning chairs found rearranged and several additional chairs.

#### 2-3 AUG

Doreen (friend of Shirley) reports tapping; movement of bedclothes; polish, two plastic egg cups and a scent bottle left in bed; being pinched.

#### 11 AUG

Following Chib's instructions, Wally asks Donald to write number 7. A piece of paper found with Roman numerals VII, 7 stylised fleur-de-lis symbols and Arabic numeral '7'.

#### 13 AUG

Message from Donald (to Wally): "I want a pen that you put black water in and it writes. Not a quill pen. I want one like Shirley has got. I can keep my own diary like I did." Notebook and fountain pen provided; more writings.

#### 15 AUG

Shirley instructed by Donald to leave the front room so he can decorate it. On return, she finds a large fleur-de-lis surmounting a shield on which seven small fleur-de-lis were arranged and a

pinned up blue cloth. Cloth flies across room as Shirley walks in.

#### 23 AUG

Small parcel found on floor of passageway by Shirley. Inside is a small gold colour crown with inset jewels (possible ruby, emerald and diamond) decorated with seven tiny fleur-de-lis. It is wrapped in tissue paper and cotton wool. Parcel replaced in passageway and when reopened a few minutes later the crown has vanished.

#### 27 AUG

Moans heard coming from under Wally's bed. Message from Donald: "Moaning Jim is in the bed room – Do you know fire the Nan room." Wally heard: "Oh, Ethel, Ethel."

#### 14 SEPT

Message from Donald: "I still want Kerch Rena – Wee I do – And have you got my box match and do you now that Shagy Roots has taken all my matches?"

#### 15 SEPT

Message from Shagy Roots: "I going to set fire to your bed – I warn I burn you up and tell that Donald he will go to – I got matches."

#### 23-25 SEPT

Messages from Donald about actor Jeremy Spenser. For example: "Do you like Jeremy? – He is sweet – I like him to meet Renee."

#### 28 SEPT

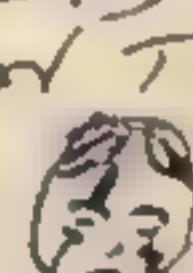
Chib visits with friends Eric Biddle, Ken Kellar and Marianne Francis (Ken's wife). Eric, Ken and Marianne hold a séance and receive a message from Donald (via tapping) warning that Jeremy Spenser would be involved in a car accident on Tuesday 2 October. Several similar messages requesting people inform Jeremy of the impending danger.

#### 1 OCT

Pale pink line appears on Shirley's face.

#### 8 OCT

Line reappears on Shirley's face plus less defined marks on her cheeks.

6-30pm SHIRLEY HAS A MARK  
ON FORE HEAD AGAIN FROM  
TOP OF BROW TO MIDDLE OF  
RIGHT EYE  MARKS  
ON SHIRLEY FACE UNDER SKIN

10-15pm / I MUST SEE JEREMY YOU  
WILL PROMISE TOMORROW

SHIRLEY WENT TO BE STILL  
MARKED ON HER FACE.



ABOVE: Marks that appeared on Shirley's face on Monday 8 Oct 1956, sketched by her father Wally.

#### 17 OCT

Message from Donald: "I want a sweet – do you? If I was in France I would have a dragee. It is almond in sugar... If I go to France again I will go to 28 Rue du Baal, Paris, and get you one. I was given a box of dragees when I was baptised... do you want some if I get one? The Seugnot family were makers of those lovely dragees. I do not know of Mme Seugnot now. She had a daughter and two sons. The daughter was called Marie, and the sons, Perrie and Paul. But the shop is still there. I think Mons and Mme Seugnot were guillotined for being Royalist, but their children lived." Chibbett sends letter to representatives of the French Chamber of Commerce asking about firm called 'Seugnot' at given address. Reply confirming "Yes" received 11 June 1958. Alcoholic liquid poured over Wally's bed.

#### 18 OCT

A lamp, clock and a dog ornament found on a mat in front room.

#### 19 OCT

Report of rat poison left in Kitty's bed.

#### 22 OCT

During the night, Donald says: "Get out of this house, now." Mewing and moaning sounds. Small ornaments thrown.

#### 23 OCT

Warning message from Donald (via tapping) about Shagy Roots starting a fire. Pile of hot ashes discovered on mat in a downstairs room. Whispering.

#### 24 OCT

Bacon and basin of fat disappear. Fat found in scullery later. Whispering. Kitty finds broken egg in her bed. Eggs thrown. Ethel finds one smashed in an armchair in upstairs room, as well as other eggs plus salt mixed with tomato sauce.

#### 26 OCT

Water and custard powder poured into Shirley's bed. Ethel (now back at No 63) sees unattached commode lid revolving by itself. Ethel says she is going to go into a home. John reports he has had enough and is going into lodgings.

#### 1 NOV

Chibbett receives first letter posted by a poltergeist.

#### 11 NOV

Whispering voices heard calling for Ethel. John's lighter missing.

#### 21 NOV

Ethel reports her left arm being tightly grabbed as she walks down the stairs.

#### 25 NOV

Message from Donald (written): "Renee – Jeremy will have his axedent." Later that night, Jeremy Spenser involved in car accident.

#### 9 DEC

Message from Donald (written): "They have accendant – Paula." News report later in evening of fatal car accident involving Paula Marshall (actress, wife of David Nixon).

#### 21-31 DEC

Christmas decorations and prehistoric-type drawings appear on wall. "Happy New Year" messages left in family's beds. Fan mail sent to favourite TV personalities. Daily letters from Donald received by family. Shirley reports photo of Jeremy Spenser, hanging above her

bed, sheds real tears. Frantic tapping occurs immediately prior to visitors knocking at front door.

• OTHER REPORTED PHENOMENA

Tapping/knocking regularly (even on days where no other phenomena reported); half-pint milk bottle thrown from upstairs landing passed Kitty somehow landing in back garden (witnessed by neighbour); red and blue grease paint heard to have fallen in other part of room; small exercise book heard to whizz past Shirley and land behind an ornament in the glass case at opposite end of room; chair in Ethel's room slowly tilts and falls over; cork disappears; small tea strainer hits Wally on back of head in the yard; strips of carpet drawn along the floor; entire room covered in talcum powder; Ethel's 'pig bin' (food scraps) found alight on several occasions; whirling winds occasionally reported in conjunction with some phenomena; various objects "float through the air"; mysterious drafts; sudden drops in temperature; strange whistling noises; multiple messages (tapped and written) from Donald about French origin (by the end of Nov 1956, half of all messages are written ones); Wally reports that some incidents occur when Shirley is not there.

## 1957

1 JAN

Midnight: knocking/tapping

10 FEB

Shirley hears faint voice calling 'Natalie'. Wally discovers message on wall: "I want Natalie." Via a 'glass divination' session, Shirley and Doreen establish the communicating spirit is James Dean (actor, died in car crash Sept 1955). Dean communicates regularly for some time (via tapping, written and typewritten letters).

23 FEB

Message from Donald: "Do you know – Renie – John Wayne – The one we saw tonight [...] is going to have a accident – Do what you like about it – I know get mixed up any more." John Wayne reported to have torn ligaments in his left foot on set of film on 24 Feb.

20 MAY

In Ethel's bedroom, drawers ransacked, purse stolen, boot print on bed. Police called but they conclude it was 'Donald'. Family divided over Donald vs Burglar.

10 JUNE

Message from Donald (via tapping): "Renie – you are not going to work – No – Kit can say what she likes – I do not wish her to go." Shirley's work clothes dirtied. Objects thrown into passageway. Front room furniture in disarray. Downstairs bed stripped of bedclothes.

25 JUNE

Object thrown. Banging on walls for three hours. Piano is played three times. Shirley locked out of room. Loud footsteps up and down stairs. Heavy stick hitting banisters and stairs. Furious tapping (warning from Donald of impending plane crash).

27 JUNE

Andrew Green (psychical researcher) arrives, commissioned to investigate by *News Chronicle*. Reports hearing: tapping generally; footsteps going down the stairs; knocking on ceiling; knocking on wardrobe; and receiving three letters and a Christmas card from Donald.



ABOVE: The heart-shaped pendant Donald gave to Shirley on her 18th birthday, together with its original bag

28 JUNE

Over the summer, reports of mysterious 'poison pen letters', signed 'D. A. T', received by neighbours in Wycliffe Road and Hanbury Road area.

1 JULY

Mirror in front room covered with material and chair moved. Several unsmoked cigarettes on piano top. Next morning, Wally finds cigarettes have been smoked.

14 AUG

Camera with fresh roll of film left in front room. A few minutes later, photographs have been taken. Eight photographs developed, all blurry and indistinct.

24-25 DEC

Christmas Eve. Family leaves presents for Donald (toy soldiers, a fort and chocolate clown). Later presents are found unwrapped. Christmas morning – Donald has left presents for family (Kitty – brooch, Wally – tie pin and collar studs, Shirley – perfume).

• OTHER REPORTED PHENOMENA

Constant messages from Donald (and other identities including the Dauphin) both written and via tapping; loud tapping and banging on adjoining walls with No 65; shopping put into shopping bag the family hadn't bought; smoked and unsmoked cigarettes found in front room ashtray; money disappears; rooms found in disarray; letters sent to Chibbett; further attempts by Donald to take photographs (all were blurry).

## 1958

17 FEB

Kitty and Shirley hear heavy footsteps in passageway. Kitty finds mashed tomatoes in her bedsheets. Hard tapping.

25 FEB

Dolls found in coal cellar following Donald's prediction of a plane crashing on No 63.

11 JUNE

Reply received to letter sent by Chibbett (on 10 Oct 1956) to representatives of the French Chamber of Commerce. Letter states: "Thank you for your letter... concerning a shop at 28, Rue du Bac, Paris 17e. Upon enquiry, I have pleasure in advising you that there still exists at the above address a sweetshop with the heading of Seugnot."

15 JULY

Objects thrown around front room. Piano playing. Lamp shade in middle of floor. Loud footsteps all over the front room floor.

17 JULY

Piano playing. Sounds of feet dancing. Piano is found in passageway; Wally and Shirley move it back. Piano partly dismantled – part in passageway, part under Shirley's bed, part on bedroom floor.

25 JULY

Hissing sound. Shirley reports finding herself in a ball of green fire. Room filled with smoke. Piano playing. Feet stamping. Neighbours woken.

5 DEC

Parcel from Donald containing blue blouse left for Shirley (for her birthday). She also receives an ornate costume necklace.

20 DEC

Christmas decorations completed in Shirley's room. Donald sends Christmas cards to various people, including Jeremy Spenser.

• OTHER REPORTED PHENOMENA

Constant messages from Donald (and other identities) both written and tapped; knocking; tapping.

## 1959

10-11 JAN

John reports hearing noises.

21 JAN

Hard tapping in morning.

27 JAN

Shirley's pencil disappears. Found on a table in the scullery. Wally experiences a bad draught. Wally asks Donald to blow out his lighter. After two attempts, he does.

19-20 MAR

Piano playing. Banging. Light going on and off.

14 SEPT

Shirley wakes up with faint orange marks down right side of face. Marks worse next day.

15 SEPT

Silver-coloured Yale door key appears on sideboard. Does not fit any lock.

19 SEPT

A milk bottle thrown up the stairs at Shirley, who is covered in milk.

25 DEC

"Gift exchange" as in previous years.

27 DEC

Loud banging on walls.

• OTHER REPORTED PHENOMENA

Constant messages from Donald (and other identities) both written and via tapping.

## 1963

Harold Chibbett visits Paris. Discovers the sweet shop is not there.

## 1960-68

OTHER REPORTED PHENOMENA

Constant messages from Donald (and other identities) both written and via tapping; knocking; banging. Hitchings family move to new home in Latchmere Road, Battersea, in 1964. Shirley marries Derek in March 1965. Shirley and Derek move to south coast in 1967. Objects misplaced or moved at new house after Shirley leaves.

# URGENT

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# THE HIDDEN SIDE OF THE PRADO

The links between the artistic and the esoteric have been the subject of much interest in recent years, and nowhere more so than Spain, where Javier Sierra's bestselling novel *The Master of the Prado* has brought 'occulture' out of the shadows. CLIVE PRINCE travelled to Madrid for a personal tour of the Museum with Javier, exploring the borderlands between artistic practice and arcane meaning.

High on any tourist's list in Madrid is a visit to the Museo del Prado, Spain's national gallery. At least it was back when visitors could jostle carefree in the city's plazas and wander through the Prado's galleries unmasked and without keeping to a one-way, socially-distanced route. Ah, those heady pre-pandemic days of 2019...

Like many galleries and museums, the Prado has its hidden side, one literally hidden in plain sight. And on 13 October 2019 I was initiated into its secrets.

I was in Spain for the launch of an updated translation marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the book Lynn Picknett and I wrote about Leonardo da Vinci's faking of the Turin Shroud, the first we worked on together. The main event was delivering a lecture at the annual Encuentro Internacional de Ocultura (International Occulture Conference) in the historic city of León. Sadly, fate had decreed that I was going solo on this trip, as a severe back problem had prevented Lynn from travelling.

'Occulture' – a term coined by Genesis P-Orridge back in the Eighties – has become a bit off a buzzword in recent years. It describes the interaction between esoterica and wider culture, representing, in the definition of Gary Lachman (with whom Lynn and I travelled to speak at the first León conference two years earlier), "the strange interzone between creativity and ritual, the liminal space blending magic and art."<sup>1</sup> (see FT253:44-45, 310:56-57)

The Ocultura Conference is the kind of public event that we don't have in Britain, where interest in the esoteric is rather more, well, esoteric. In Spain *ocultismo* is taken more seriously. The conference, a four-day series of lectures, one each evening, is supported by León's city council and held in its grand auditorium – and entry is free.



## He is drawn into conversation with the mysterious Doctor Luis Forel

This year's theme was 'The Great Mysterious of Art', with which our work on Leonardo fitted neatly. The other speakers were an art historian (Guillermo Solana, director of Madrid's prestigious Thyssen Art Museum, on the influence of Spiritualism on the Surrealist movement), an Egyptologist (Nacho Ares, on pharaonic art and architecture) and an astrologer (Vicente Cassanya, on the use of astrological symbolism in art). Lynn and I had been invited to give the closing lecture, on the Saturday night that was also Spain's National Day.

LEFT: Javier Sierra (left) and Clive Prince at the 2019 Ocultura Conference in León. FACING PAGE TOP: Madrid's Museo del Prado. FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Raphael and Romano's *La Perla*, or The Holy Family.

The event is the creation of its host, Javier Sierra, and is tied in with a series of books, also entitled 'Ocultura' and published by Luciérnaga, that he curates. Javier is a high-profile figure in Spain on matters mysterious, anomalous and esoteric, with a CV as long as your arm that begins with having his own radio show at the age of 12. He was at one time the director of *Más Allá (Beyond)*, a kind of Spanish *Fortean Times*, to which he remains a consultant. He's written nonfiction books on Roswell and ancient civilisations, and edited and presented TV shows about the paranormal, UFOs and other fortean subjects, his current one being *Otros mundos (Other Worlds)*.

He's also an award-winning novelist, in 2017 receiving Spain's top literary prize, the Premio Planeta de Novela, for *El fuego invisible (The Invisible Fire)*. His 2004 novel about Leonardo da Vinci, *La cena secreta (The Secret Supper)*, made the *New York Times* bestseller lists; coincidentally, it came out around the same time as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* and, like that novel, drew some inspiration from our book *The Templar Revelation*. Appropriately, Lynn and I first met Javier during the 'Da Vinci Code trial' in London's High Court in 2006 (see FT209:4-5, 210:5).

He's possibly the coolest guy I know, wearing his celebrity lightly, and with a deeper knowledge of his subjects than hosts of 'mysteries' TV shows tend to have in the English-speaking world. And, somehow, he finds time to organise and present the Ocultura conferences.

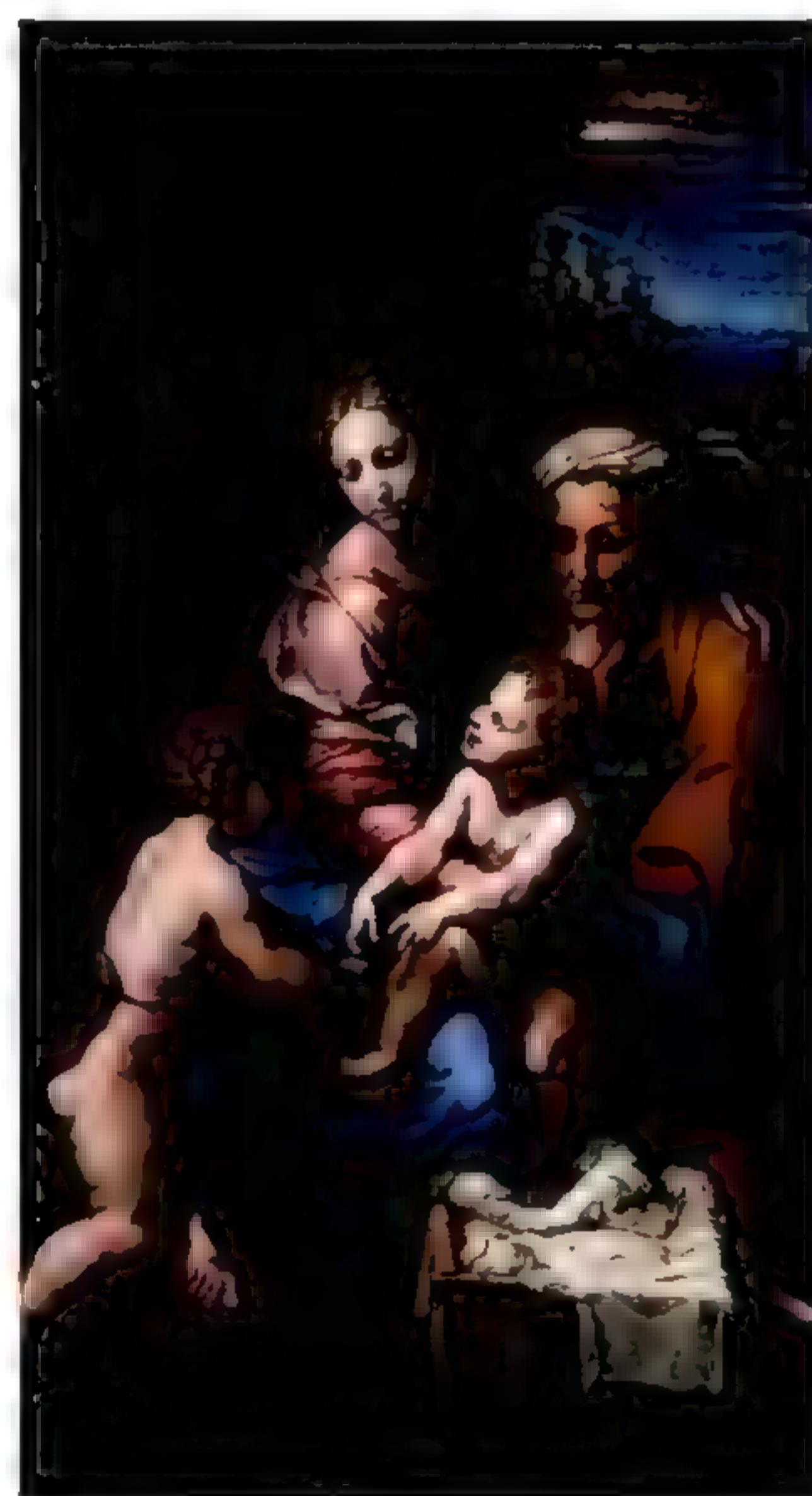


The day after the talk, I took the train to Madrid with Isabela Herranz, herself a writer on mysteries who was interpreting for the trip (Lynn and I first met her at an FT UnConvention back in the early 2000s), for a rest day before launching into a round of media to publicise the book. It was then – after being introduced to genuine Spanish paella by Javier and his delightful family at Sunday lunch – that Javier took me on an afternoon tour of the Prado.

### THE ARCANON

Having Javier as a guide made my first visit even more special. The museum is the setting for Javier's haunting 2013 novel, *El maestro del Prado* (*The Master of the Prado*), which stayed on Spain's bestseller lists for over a year. It's a tale that blurs the line between imagination and reality, deliberately provoking the question of how much of it is *really* fiction.<sup>2</sup>

The narrator is Javier himself, in his days as a 19-year-old student at the beginning of the 1990s, and tells the story of his initiation into the esoteric mysteries of art. During a visit to the Prado, while he is contemplating *The Pearl* by Raphael and his pupil Giulio Romano, Javier is drawn into conversation with the mysterious Dr Luis Fovel – the 'Master' of the

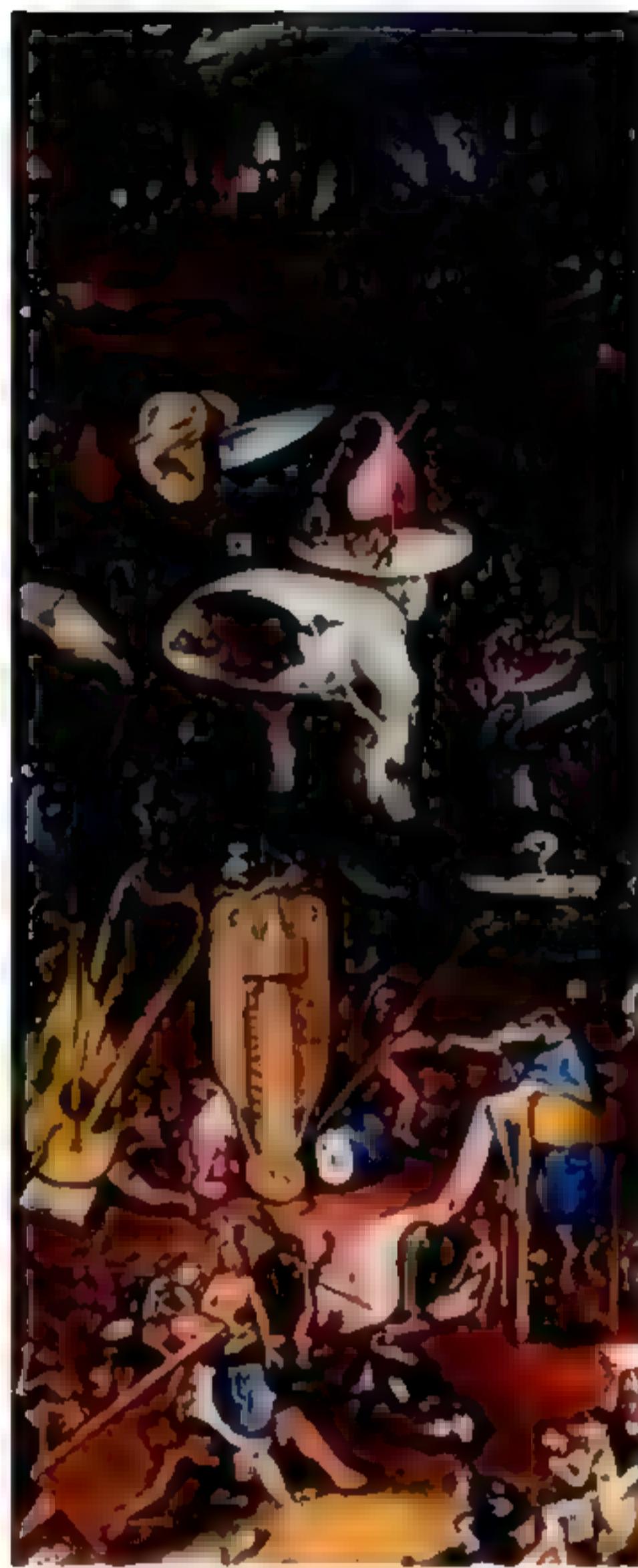


title – who, at more meetings over the ensuing weeks, explains the secrets encoded in some of the gallery's most celebrated paintings and embroils Javier in increasingly labyrinthine events as he tries to unravel the truth about Dr Fovel. The question hangs over the story of whether the Master is a man, a ghost, or something else – perhaps a guiding spirit of some kind.

In the novel, Fovel introduces the youthful Javier to what he calls the Prado's 'arcanon' – an arcane canon of selected works put together by "wizards, astrologers, and doctors of occult philosophy" at the Spanish court, works which "could best serve certain supernatural ends".

And, as Javier guided me through the galleries, taking me through some of the same works, as well as others that don't feature in the novel, I realised that he was doing the same for me, effectively becoming my Dr Fovel.

The hidden mysteries of art have always been a main interest of mine and Lynn's. *The Templar Revelation* begins with an analysis – a decoding – of heretical symbolism in the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, and the recognition that parallel imagery appears in the works of Jean Cocteau, an artist far removed



ABOVE: *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, by Hieronymous Bosch, in which Salvador Dali (opposite page) discovered his own portrait. BELOW: Javier Sierra in the Prado.

from Leonardo in time, culture and style.

Over the near quarter-century since that book we've continued to explore the cryptic thread linking some of the great artists down the centuries, finding more associations ourselves and connecting with others – for example, the Brussels-based conceptual artist Kendell Geers – whose own research has led him on a similar path. Kendell has found eerily precise, deeply concealed hermetic signs hidden in the work of Leonardo that were repeated through the work of Poussin and Ingres and into the 20th century with the likes of Cocteau, Picabia and even as unexpected an artist as Marcel Duchamp, he of urinal-as-art fame.<sup>3</sup>

But that's another story. For now, we're in the Prado, with Javier opening a new chapter.

The paintings of the arcanon are for the most part religious and – like Leonardo's – portray apparently conventional Christian scenes and imagery while containing discordant elements that are open to decidedly less conventional interpretations. Fovel's decoding of some, particularly those showing the Holy Family – *The Pearl* is a prime example – chime strikingly with our analyses of Leonardo's works. There is, for example, the same predilection for depicting Mary and Joseph with two children, one assumed to be John the Baptist, their appearances so similar as to confuse their identities.

The works are mainly from the Spanish Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries, and many were assembled by two of Spain's greatest Habsburg kings, Charles I and his son



Philip II. Both were leaders and defenders of Catholic Europe: on the surface ultra-Catholics who, in the contrary way of the age (and the imperious doublethink of those who believe themselves to be above others), privately patronised alchemists and other practitioners of the magical arts, as well as heretics. Hedging their bets, maybe...

### EARTHLY DELIGHTS

The works that weren't commissioned by those imperial majesties were sought out by them – the booty of war or purchases from

other sovereigns. The first exhibit Javier showed me, perhaps the Prado's most famous, was part of the booty, taken from William of Orange during the Dutch Revolt: Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, painted in the opening years of the 16th century.

Unlike in Javier's student days, the triptych is now displayed in the round, so that the images on the panels that originally faced outward when it was closed can be examined. They show a monochrome view of the world with an ancient, bearded God seated in a bubble above it.

The three vividly coloured panels of the opened triptych – as bright as the pictures in a children's book – seem to present a conventional Christian message. In the left-hand panel a naked Adam and Eve relax with a robed God in the Garden of Eden, pre-Fall. In the centre, a populated Earth swarms with people, again naked, cavorting with all manner of animals and birds and gorging on fruits – the earthly delights of its modern title. Finally, on the right, is a darkened world, lit only by blitz-like fires silhouetting ruined buildings, with men and women being tormented and devoured by grotesque creatures. The products and apparatus of mankind's progress – knives, a thermometer, an hourglass, musical instruments – take on nightmarish forms and turn on their creators.

The message seems simple enough: we were in Eden (past), fell through sin and are heading towards Hell and damnation (future). Interpretations of the middle scene – the present – vary: either a hedonistic pursuit of

sensual pleasure that will lead us to that damnation (although there's little overt eroticism, with only one distant couple seeming to touch intimately), or a depiction of the unthinking innocence that's taking us down the same path.

But, Javier explains, there is evidence not only that Bosch was steeped in the occult philosophy of his day but was a member of the Adamite sect. The original Adamites were a heretical north African group, known from condemnations in early Church writings, which believed that salvation was to be found in returning to the way Adam and Eve lived, for which reason they worshipped naked. Considering marriage a consequence of the expulsion from Eden, the Adamites practised free love. Although the original sect disappeared in the fourth century, it was revived – inspired, ironically, by those early denunciations – in Bohemia and the Netherlands in the late 13th century, and had spread to France and northern Italy, one of a number of related millennialist sects that rejected the world as it was and sought to return to a simpler way of life.<sup>4</sup>

Javier points out clues indicating that Bosch intended his work to be read, like Hebrew, from right to left. The big one is that the God in the Eden scene is clearly Jesus – a young man, as opposed to the old one in the bubble – which of course doesn't work in terms of the Adam and Eve story. And, he elaborates, if you read it that way “you obtain the perfect creed of the Adamites.” The ‘Hell on Earth’ scene really represents the state of the world as Bosch saw it in his own day. The central scene shows how he thinks we should be living: naked, free and communing joyously with nature, depicting, as Javier says, the “rites of purification” that the Adamites thought would save us and lead to “the arrival of the Kingdom of Jesus: a New World Order that will last a thousand years.”

The triptych, with its dreamlike imagery and dramatic colours, was a seminal influence on the Spanish Surrealist Salvador Dalí, who spent days studying it and experienced a soul-shaking moment when one day, among the rocks in the Garden, he spotted his own face peering out. Javier explains: “For Dalí to see himself in the triptych had to be a kind of hallucinogenic experience, an epiphany. Suddenly he realised that he was predestined to reinterpret art from top to bottom. And so the seed of Surrealism was planted in him.” (For another Dalian epiphany, and a portal, see pp56-57.)

Adamite-type beliefs were certainly to be found around the Spanish court. The network of sects to which they belonged included the Familia Caritatis (‘Family of Love’), which held very similar beliefs and rejected the Trinity and baptism. Philip II's official printer was a Familist, and several art historians have argued that Brueghel the Elder (c.1525-1569), whose paintings form part of the Prado's arcanon, was another. So too was another favourite of Philip's, El Greco, who is more widely recognised as a mystic and visionary:

Fovel describes him as “another artist for whom painting served principally as a repository of a revolutionary credo that prophesied the arrival of a new humanity and of direct communication with the invisible.”

### LAS MENINAS

Much of the royal collection, which formed the basis of the Prado's, was acquired and curated in the 17th century by Diego Velasquez, including many of the works, such as the



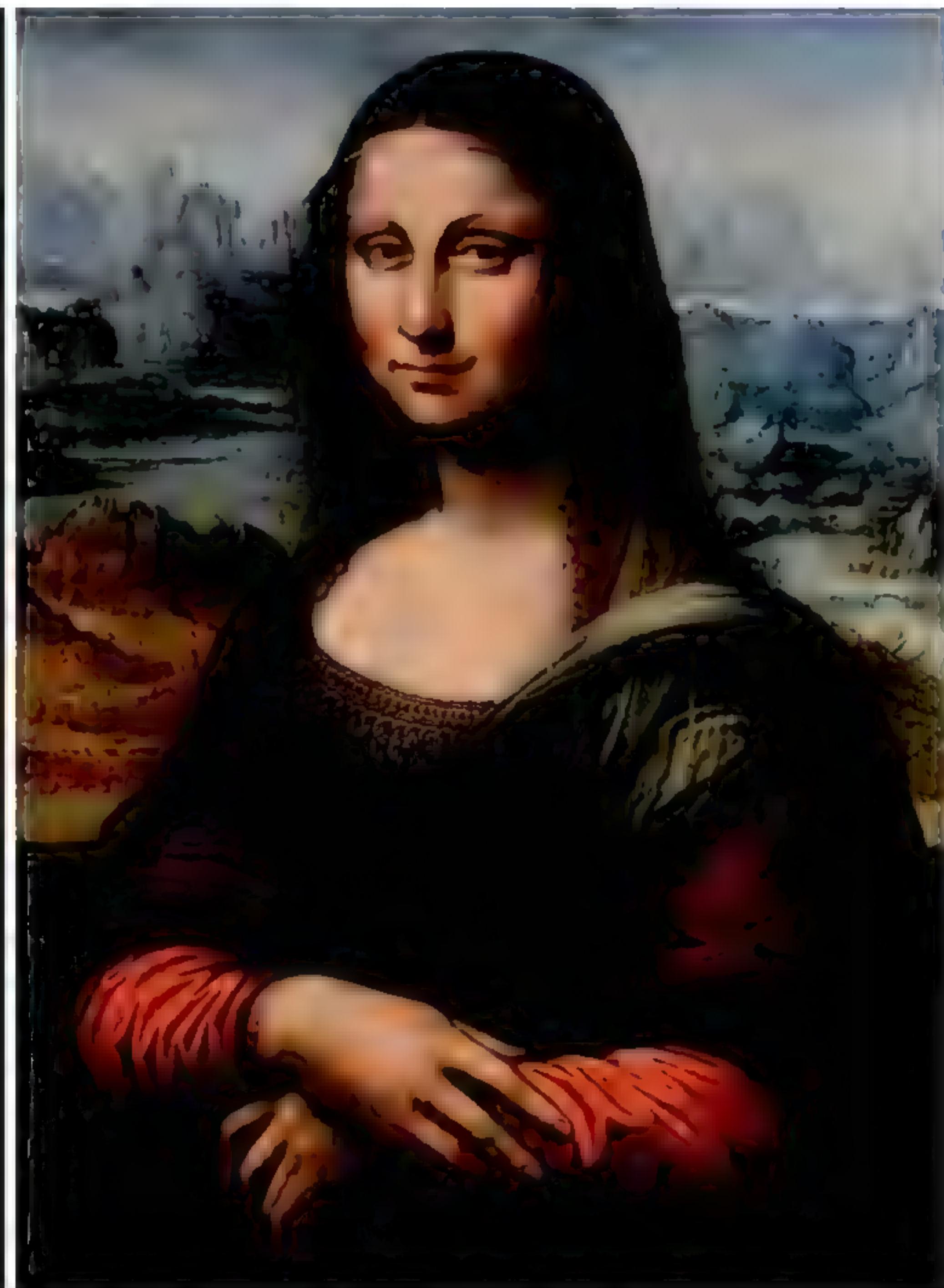
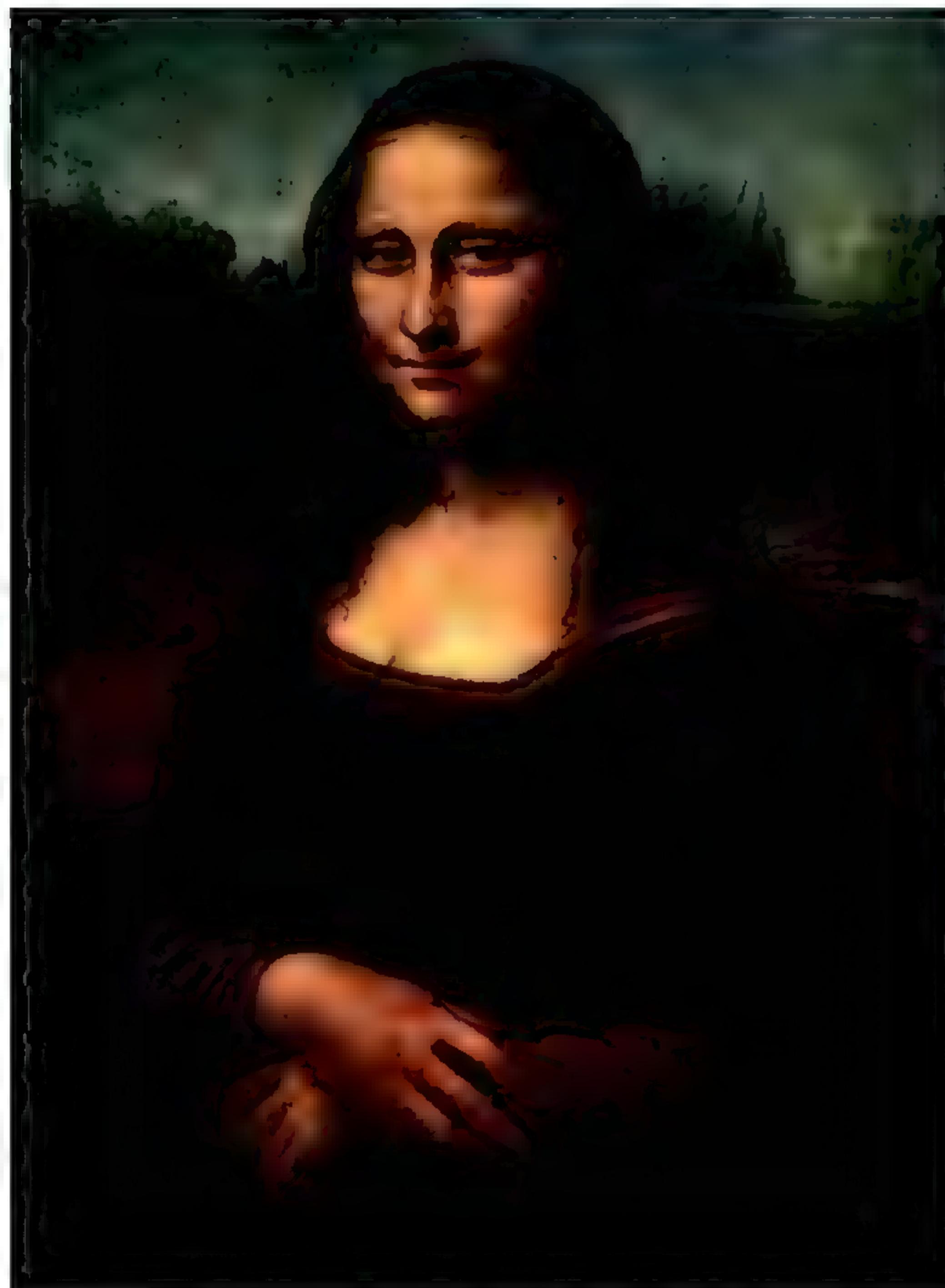
ABOVE: *Las Meninas*, or *The Ladies-in-Waiting*, by Velazquez. Its strikingly playful composition seems to hint at enigmas and hidden meanings that have kept art historians busy for centuries.

Raphael and Titians, whose meaning Javier was initiating me into. If there is an arcanon, then Velasquez was its founder.

Javier shows me, in gallery 12, Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (*The Ladies-in-Waiting*) of 1656, one of the most enigmatic paintings ever produced for a royal patron, and one that has defied analysis for centuries. Velasquez himself features in it, standing behind a canvas and looking out at us. The normal order of things is reversed: we, the viewer, are in the place where the subject Velasquez is painting stands, looking into his studio. A mirror on the far wall reflects that subject: the king and queen, Philip IV and Mariana of Austria.

The focus of the painting, though, is their infant daughter Margarita – at that time their only child – with her junior ladies-in-waiting, being kept amused by her dwarf Mari Barbola and a resigned-looking mastiff. The painting is about her and yet, strangely, that looking-glass reversal where we become the subject – the king? – and everything inside the painting hints at some other meaning.

Javier tells me about the work, in the 1970s, of another of his ‘masters’, Angel del Campo



ABOVE: *Mona Lisa* times two: The better-known original from the Louvre (left) and the Prado's version, restored in 2012 to reveal a previously unseen background.

of the Spanish Academy of Arts. Del Campo was struck by the fact that, according to the inventory of Velasquez's possessions made after his death, the majority of his books were about astrology. Faced with this evidence of his passion for that art, del Campo looked at Velasquez's œuvre with a new eye. He found that the figures in *Las Meninas* were arranged to represent the constellation of Corona Borealis: at that time, its largest star, represented here by little Margarita, was called Margarita Borealis. Moreover, joining all the characters in the painting outlines the sign of Capricorn.

Javier elucidates: "Why? Well, the only character here who was Capricorn was the Queen. She is in the reflection in the mirror, just beside the King, in the centre of the circle made by the sign. In 1656, when the painting was made, Spain was waiting for the birth of a new baby boy who could occupy the throne. The King was very old and the possibility of a "failure", and with it the end of the dynasty, was high. According to Angel del Campo, *Las Meninas* was painted as a giant talisman to protect the royal marriage and to give them the good luck to generate a boy."

If so, it was successful: against the odds, five years later, the future Charles II – known as 'the Bewitched' – was born, although this was something of a mixed blessing; as Javier points out, he was a very weak king under whom Spain lost much of its power and prestige.

## Artists, like poets, delve into the personal abyss of the unconscious

### THE PRADO'S MONALISA

Naturally, I was especially engaged by the Prado's own version of the *Mona Lisa*. It's been there since the mid-17th century; how it got there is unknown, and although the first document referring to it describes it as "by the hand of Leonardo da Vinci" it has long been regarded as a later copy of Leonardo's masterpiece. Until 2012, that is, when restoration work removed the solid-black background to reveal a landscape exactly matching that of the Louvre original. This surprise discovery prompted a reappraisal, and the consensus now is that the Prado painting was produced in Leonardo's own studio by one of his apprentices in parallel with the Maestro working on the real thing. Its market value leapt accordingly.

However, Javier makes some good points that suggest the original attribution could be correct after all. Most tellingly, the Prado

*Mona* is painted on expensive walnut, whereas the Louvre one is on cheap poplar: why, he asks, would the apprentice paint on the top-quality wood while the commission is on the cheap stuff?

If Javier is right, it would provide an answer to one of the biggest puzzles (of many) about the *Mona Lisa*. According to the standard account it was a portrait commissioned around 1503 by the wealthy and well-connected Florentine silk merchant Francesco del Giocondo of his wife Lisa. But it was apparently never delivered: Leonardo continued working on it, and it was hanging in the room in France where he died 16 years later. Clearly it had a great personal meaning for him. Leonardo producing two versions – as he did with other works – one to fulfil the commission and another for himself, provides a neat solution to the question of the painting's provenance.

### THE INTERZONE

The intertwining of art and the arcane wasn't just a feature of the Renaissance: it continued – indeed continues. It's usually hidden, occulted, but it became overt in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, with the artistic and occult worlds openly cohabiting, most obviously in the Salons Rose+Croix, annual artfests organised in the 1890s by occultist and art critic Joséphin Péladan, founder of the Ordre du Temple de la Rose-Croix, which was both an esoteric and aesthetic society.

As explored in art historian Nadia Choucha's *Surrealism and the Occult*, the 19th-century Symbolists consciously employed concepts and imagery drawn from occult and magical systems, a symbiotic relationship that passed on to its successors, Dadaism and Surrealism. Occult-inspired artists include Odilon Redon, Félicien Rops, Kandinsky, and Klimt.

All this prompts the obvious question – which Lynn and I have been exploring for many years now – of just why esoteric and heretical imagery turns up in the works of so many artists from so many periods.

To a degree it's explained by the mindset of the artist. The great painters didn't simply want to produce an aesthetically pleasing picture that satisfied their patron. Painting, like poetry, is an expression of a deeper impulse, one that is ultimately about attempting to show reality as it is. And the great artists understand that reality is shaped as much by our inner perception as by what is objectively out there. They don't just look outward, but within. And artists dislike limits. The artistic mindset is one that, almost by definition, takes the artist to places where they're not supposed to go, exploring the forbidden. In a society that is religiously tightly controlled, that leads to heresy and magic. For artists in times of greater religious freedom, it was, instead, sexual taboos that were explored. And the occult: Choucha explains its attraction to 19th- and 20th-century artists as being "opposition and challenge to the Establishment, academism, and accepted values, conditions, and standards".<sup>5</sup>

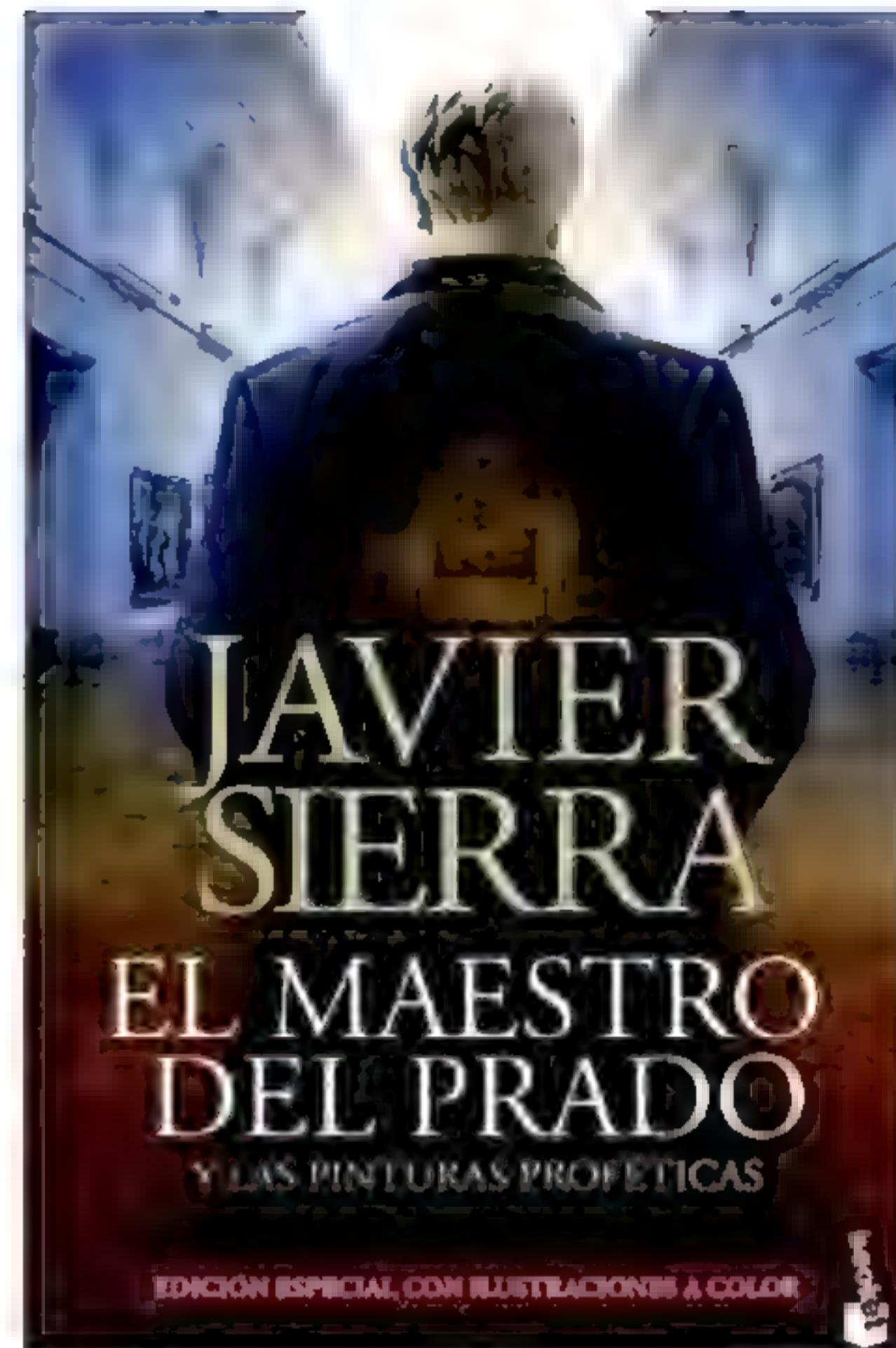
As Javier puts it in his novel, speaking of Raphael: "The Pearl's creator had an innate opposition to rules. He was a rebel."

But there's still more to it than that. Artists, again like poets, delve into the imagination and the personal abyss of the unconscious, and when you go down there all manner of strangeness can happen.

It's the same space inhabited by the magician. Which shouldn't surprise us: as Carl Abrahamsson, editor of the 'occultural journal' *Fenris Wolf*, observes, art began as a magical act, with cave paintings.<sup>6</sup> The fictional Dr Fovel makes the same point: "If you go back 40,000 years ago, to when people were living in caves, they were already painting images on the cave walls as a way to gain access to other worlds." In short, art is itself a magical technique. For Abrahamsson the essence of art is "instigating magical change through aestheticised personal expression".<sup>7</sup>

It has long been recognised that certain Renaissance paintings employed the same principles that were used in the magic of the time. The example that's usually offered, to the point that it's become something of a cliché, is Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, which is essentially a talisman invoking that goddess. Just as Velasquez's *Las Meninas* is a talisman for Capricorn.

It's not just about the artist, of course: works of art are intended to have an effect on the viewer, too. Paintings are designed to stir the imagination and emotions, which is what



makes our response to art indefinable in mere words. Beyond that, though, they can be meditative devices, something most apparent in, but not exclusive to, religious works.

As Arthur Versluis, professor of religious studies at Michigan State University, puts it in his study of the relationship between art and mysticism: "Contemplative art draws us in toward the union of subject and object: by observing art, we participate in it, and that participation is also exaltation beyond our limited self." He quotes a contemporary critic on Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church's *The Heart of the Andes* (1859), that it transforms the viewer into a "demigod", provoking an "awakening into a higher consciousness".<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the contemplation of a painting is a way of entering an altered state. In magical terms, altered states aren't just internal, but create a space – Gary Lachman's 'interzone' – where things can happen in the external world. Paintings become, in the modern buzzword, portals. Javier sees this as the common thread connecting the arcanon's paintings; they are "doorways to other worlds". As Fovel says of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*: "You have to think of this painting as a doorway, a portal that will transport you to a transcendent state, or reality."

After all, doesn't Velasquez positively invite us to step into *Las Meninas*? As to whether that doorway is merely metaphorical – allowing us to enter a different internal reality – or can literally take us into another world... well, how long have you got?

## TOUR'S END

Javier showed me many other paintings of fortean interest that day – Botticelli's illustration of a ghost story in the three panels of *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti*, Brueghel the Elder's zombie apocalypse in *The Triumph of Death*, which uses figures from Holbein's eerie Alphabet of Death to spell out a coded message, and more – but space doesn't allow me to go on. Most are detailed, and illustrat-

ed, in *The Master of the Prado*.

As we come to the end of the tour, I have to ask Javier the inevitable question: how much of the novel, both the encounters with Dr Fovel and the decoding of the arcanon, is fiction, and how much is real?

Javier replies candidly: "The book starts with a real memory: the unexpected meeting with an old gentleman in the Prado Museum galleries that taught a young Javier how to 'read' a painting. To be honest with you, I only met Dr Luis Fovel once, in front of Raphael's *Holy Family* or *The Pearl*. That was the painting where I learnt the basis of the symbolic reading of the art of the Renaissance period. But Fovel became such an intriguing man for me that I decided to create a fictionalised biography for him and use him as the main character for my book."

And the arcanon? "Fovel really talked to me about the 'arcanon', and that's why I assume that he was part of a secret society of some kind, probably a Spanish branch of the Rosicrucian movement, but I cannot prove it."

Taking our leave of the Prado and returning to Madrid's bustling streets, I reflect that whoever – or whatever – that mysterious Doctor was, he found a worthy apprentice in Javier – who, judging by all that he has given me to think about – is now becoming the Master.

## NOTES

1 In his foreword to Carl Abrahamsson, *Occulture: The Unseen Forces that Drive Culture Forward*, Park Street Press, 2018, ix.

2 English translation, *The Master of the Prado*, Atria Books, 2015.

3 See Geer's 2014 lecture 'Following the Blind Man: Marcel Duchamp and the Voodoun Connection' at the Luminato Festival, Toronto, Canada: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbWjzPm-09A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbWjzPm-09A); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfv1zqog8U0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfv1zqog8U0)

4 The German art historian Wilhelm Fraenger, in the mid-20th century, presented the case for Bosch as an occultist and Adamite, while Lynda Harris, graduate of the Courtauld Institute and Boston University and a specialist in Renaissance art, argues in *The Secret Heresy of Hieronymus Bosch* (1995) for a connection between the Adamites and the Cathars.

5 Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult: Shamanism, Magic, Alchemy and the Birth of an Artistic Movement*, Mandrake of Oxford, 1991, p126.

6 Abrahamsson, *Occulture*, p221.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

8 Arthur Versluis, *Platonic Mysticism: Contemplative Science, Philosophy, Literature, and Art*, SUNY Press, 2017, p120.

• CLIVE PRINCE is a London-based writer and researcher, and the co-author with Lynn Picknett of a series of books that, in FT's words, "specialise in topics that challenge established and cultural history". They are best known for *The Templar Revelation*, acknowledged by Dan Brown as the inspiration for *The Da Vinci Code*. Their latest book is *When God Had a Wife*. See [www.picknettprince.com](http://www.picknettprince.com) and [patreon/picknettprince](http://patreon/picknettprince).

# GIANTS IN THE EARTH

Did fallen angels once disobey God, descend to Earth and mate with mortal women to produce a race of gigantic beings? **TED HARRISON** explores our fascination with the mysterious Nephilim of the Bible, which now finds expression in fantasy fiction, Internet hoaxes and alien conspiracy theories.

*"The union of angel and demon created a third essence. And we are those children. We are the nephalem. We exist as half angel and half demon, yet fully a new entity."<sup>1</sup>*

Fans of digital fantasy worlds such as *Diablo* and *Darksiders* will be familiar with the 'nephalem' or Nephilim, as will be followers of the gothic rock band Fields of the Nephilim; but next time the Jehovah's Witnesses call, try asking them about these incredible giants.

Is it true that angels once disobeyed God, came down to Earth and mated with mortal women to produce a race of gigantic beings? Of course, the JWs will say, opening their Bibles to Genesis Chapter 6.

Or perhaps, to avoid getting drawn into a lengthy conversation, you could take a look at the JW website, where you will read: "The Nephilim were giants, the violent superhuman offspring produced when wicked angels mated with human women in the days of Noah." The products of this unnatural union were no ordinary children. "The Nephilim were giant bullies, tyrants who filled the Earth with violence. The Bible describes them as 'the mighty ones of old times, the men of fame'. They left behind a legacy of violence and fear."<sup>2</sup>

Those who take a literal approach to the Bible, as do the eight million Jehovah's Witnesses around the world, are in no doubt that there were indeed "giants in the Earth" a long time before any were created to inhabit an imaginary digital universe. The Nephilim of Scripture were said to have been fathered by lust-filled angels who had descended, or fallen, to Earth from Heaven to rape or seduce mortal women. The word 'Nephilim'



The Nephilim were said to have been fathered by lust-filled angels who had descended to Earth

is translated as 'giants', but derives from Hebrew, meaning 'fallen ones'.

Three hundred years ago, Cotton Mather, the Massachusetts-based Puritan famous for his part in the Salem witch trials, was shown bones that had been found near Albany, New York. He had no hesitation in declaring that they were the remains of Nephilim who had been drowned in Noah's flood. Centuries later the bones were identified as the

LEFT: One of the elongated skulls discovered on Peru's Paracas Peninsula. OPPOSITE: The Internet has seen the circulation of numerous faked photos of giant skeletons in recent years.

remains of a mastodon, a prehistoric elephant, but in the days before the development of palaeontology the Nephilim explanation made complete sense. There have been several cases in history of the remains of large animals such as mammoths, sloths, and bison being taken for those of giant humans.

Then there was the discovery in 1928 by a Peruvian archaeologist, Julio Tello, of a collection of some 300 strangely elongated skulls in a graveyard on the Paracas Peninsula in Peru. Some of the skulls were believed to be over 3,000 years old.

Inevitably, there was speculation that the skulls might be the remains of Nephilim. DNA tests in recent times produced confusing results, suggesting that the people whose remains had been unearthed had links with the other side of the Atlantic. Artificial cranial deformation has been put forward as one explanation for the curious misshapen heads and there was nothing unusual in the dimensions of the remains to suggest they had come from a race of giants.

## BIBLICAL GIANTS

The Nephilim lived, it is believed, through that ancient biblical epoch which followed Adam and Eve's departure from the Garden of Eden and which ended when God destroyed the Earth in the flood, leaving only Noah, his family and the inhabitants of the ark alive. The Bible relates that it was the wickedness of both humankind and the giants that provoked God to kill off his creatures.



However, the Bible hints that not *all* the giants perished. The Book of Numbers in the Old Testament tells of a time, many centuries later, when the Israelites had escaped from slavery in Egypt. In Chapter 13 there is the story of the first reconnaissance of the area they hoped to settle after their 40-year journey with Moses through the wilderness: it was the Promised Land, which was said to flow with milk and honey. However, it was already occupied by, among other tribes, "the descendants of a race of giants called the Anakim".

Verse 33 is more specific. Seeing the giants, the Israelite spies reported back that they "felt as small as grasshoppers, and that is how we must have looked to them."

In some translations, such as the New International Version, the word 'giants' is not used, but instead the word 'Nephilim', making the direct connection between the giants of Numbers 13 and the descendants of the lust-filled fallen angels of Genesis.

Thus, to a Bible literalist it is clear that although God destroyed the Earth and all wicked men and women in the flood, at least some of the giants must have survived into the time of Moses. Later books of the Old Testament contain direct or indirect references to these weird, huge and evil beings. The Hebrew word for 'fallen' links these passages.

In the Book of Ezekiel, this section in Chapter 32 is interpreted by some Bible scholars as referring to the Nephilim: "And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living."

Another race of giants turns up in three other Old Testament books, Deuteronomy, 2 Samuel and Joshua. They have been identified as The Rephaim, meaning 'the dead ones' and, says Dr Ellen White of The Biblical Archaeology Society, they are "often conflated with the Nephilim."

They are almost always mentioned by a specific name, such as Goliath who fought David, and as being in opposition to Israel. "Their purpose in each narrative is to die. The juxtaposition of the mighty Biblical giants defeated by the underdog, God's chosen, is foreshadowed in the very name attributed to these characters."<sup>3</sup>

So the writers of several books of the Bible appear to be of the opinion that giants had not been wiped out by the great flood. Biblical scholars who do not take every word literally might have another way of looking at the scriptural evidence. Perhaps the spies sent out by Moses saw warriors from the tribes occupying the Promised Land and had



LEFT: David with the head of Goliath.  
BELOW: An 18th century engraving shows the amazingly big bed of Og, who is described in Deuteronomy as the last of the giant Rephaim.

second thoughts about challenging them; perhaps they reported back in the most exaggerated terms that these soldiers were huge and super-human. They were like the Nephilim they had heard stories about. Later, this term from Jewish folklore might have been used to describe any strong, or larger than average, opponent. If the Israelites had turned back at that stage and never settled the Promised Land, the subsequent history of the area would have been very different.

### MYTHIC HYBRIDS

JR Porter, former Professor of Theology at Exeter University, in his *Companion to the Bible*, described the story of angels and humans mating as an ancient myth. "In Hebrew thought the human and the divine ought not to be confused, so these children violate the whole structure of the world. As punishment God frustrates any attempt on humanity's part to attain divinity and immortality by... restricting the human lifespan.

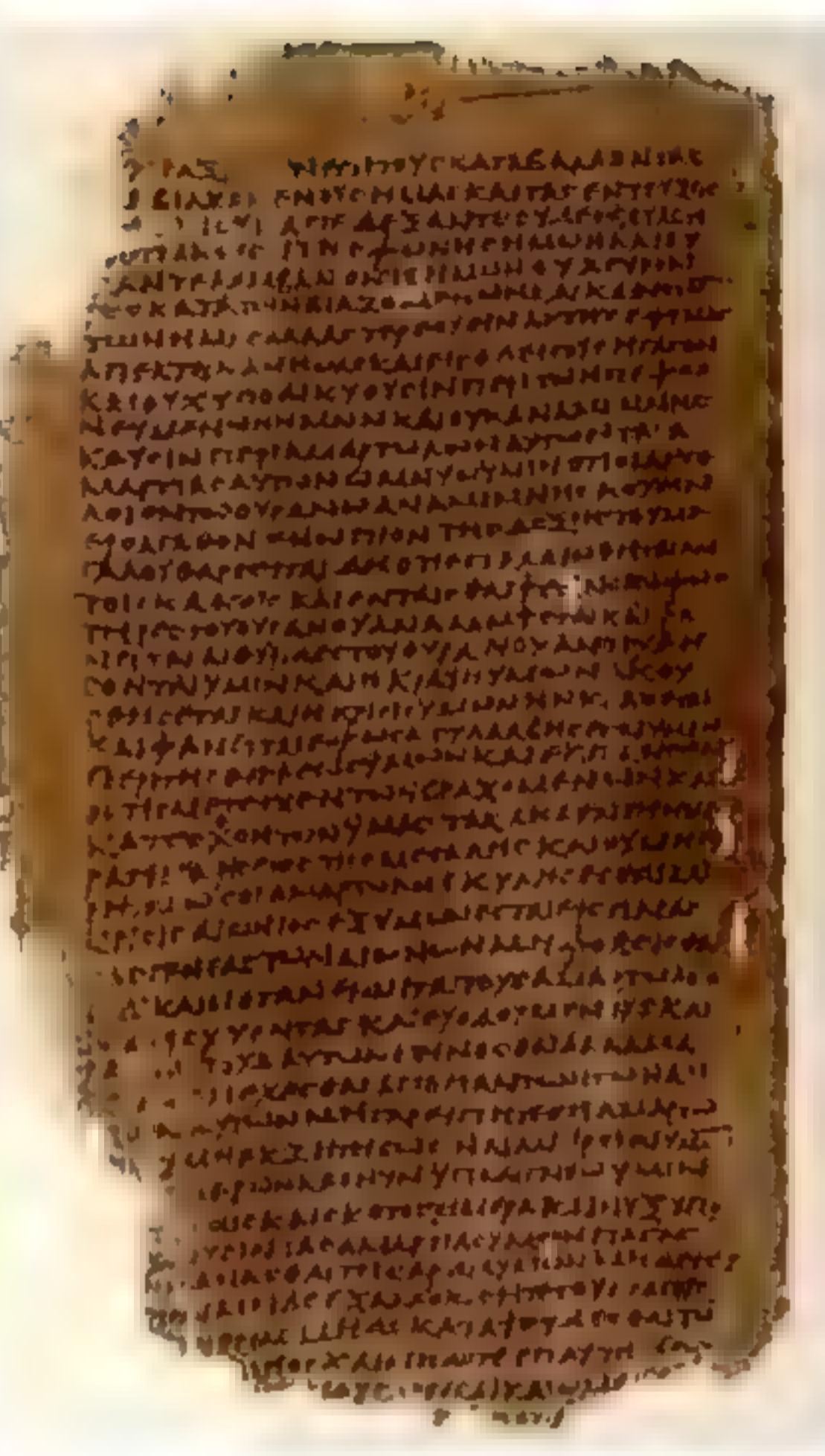
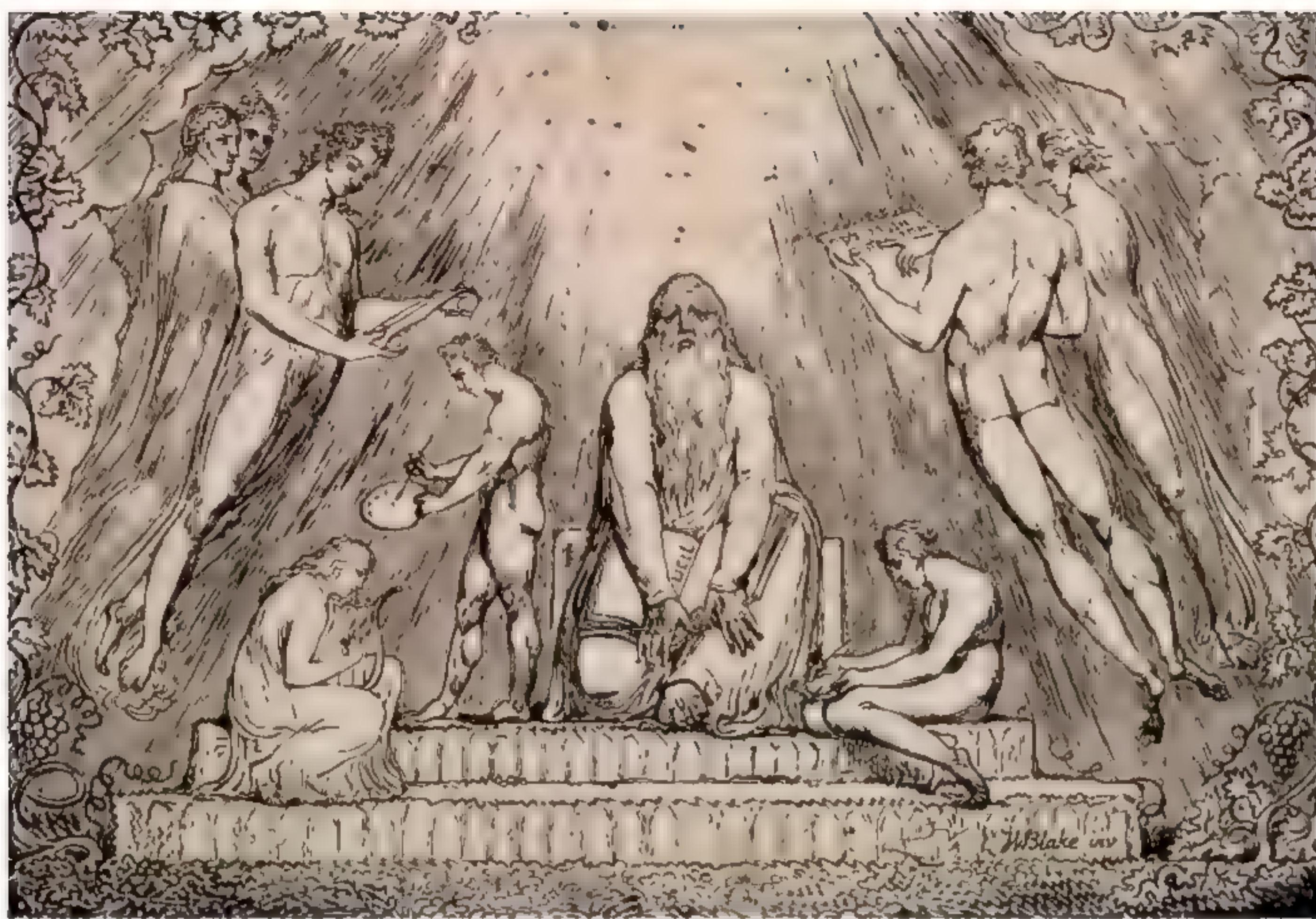
The children appear in a later chapter as the embodiment of absolute power in the ancient world, but also described as 'Nephilim', which probably means 'fallen ones'. This is one source of the myth of the fallen angels that plays such a prominent part in such books as Enoch and Jubilees. Jewish thought came to see these angels, rather than the sin of Adam, as the source of sin in the world."<sup>4</sup>

Yet it is not so much the size of the giants that has intrigued later generations, but the suggestion in Genesis 6 that the Nephilim were the result of cross-breeding between human women and supernatural beings. "When people had spread all over the world, and daughters were being born, some of the heavenly beings saw that these young women were beautiful, so they took the ones they liked... In those days, and even later, there were giants on the earth who were descendants of human women and the heavenly beings."<sup>5</sup>

The Books of Enoch are strange and ancient texts that form part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible, and were a candidate for, but ultimately excluded, from the Roman and Protestant versions. Enoch describes the arrival of lust-filled angels on Earth in greater detail:

"And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us





ABOVE LEFT: Enoch, a lithograph by William Blake. ABOVE RIGHT: A fourth century Greek manuscript of the Book of Enoch. BELOW: Nashville-based researcher William Henry, who has claimed in his books that the fallen angels mentioned in the Bible were actually ancient aliens who brought technology to mankind.

wives from among the children of men and beget us children.' And Samyaza, who was their leader, said unto them: 'I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.' And they all answered him and said: 'Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.' Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred who descended... on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it."<sup>6</sup>

Enoch gives a list of all the leaders of this band of fallen angels. They have been identified as being of the angelic class or rank of Watcher. The watchers get mentioned in the Bible in The Book of Daniel Chapter 4. It was one of the good watchers who brought a message to King Nebuchadnezzar.

William Henry is a Nashville-based art historian, who describes himself additionally as an 'investigative mythologist'. He is the author of *The Lost Secrets of the Watchers* (2015) and is one of several 'researchers' who make claims that the fallen angels of the Bible may have been aliens, and more specifically Martians. "They brought humanity technology and taught us the secrets of heaven," he says. He is one of the voices heard on a YouTube video that has so far attracted 100,000 views. "For over 100 years mythologists have been contemplating the idea that the fallen angels came from Mars to Earth." The video argues that humans living on Mars would

evolve physiologically in the weaker gravity to be taller and take on the giantism associated with the Nephilim. Their skin would be paler and their eyes would be larger, due to lower levels of sunlight on the red planet, and they would look not like Earthbound humans and more like angelic beings.<sup>7</sup>

There is a familiar genre of pseudo-science that argues that aliens arrived on Earth sometime in prehistory and gave the human race the know-how and brain-power to develop from primitive into technologically sophisticated beings. The 'was God an astronaut?' school of thought was first given a popular boost by Erich Von Däniken in 1968 (see FT169:30-37).

The Russian-American author Zecharia Sitchin has popularised a hypothesis that a race of aliens came from the hidden planet Nibiru in ancient times to inhabit the Earth (FT138:47, 173:40-41, 271:24). They created *Homo sapiens* through genetic engineering to be their workforce. Named the Anunnaki, though possibly also the source of the Nephilim stories, they built the pyramids, introduced agriculture and may possibly have produced human-alien hybrids, descendants of whom may still be alive today, with no idea of their alien origins.

In another variation of that 'theory' it is suggested that *Homo sapiens* is a cross-breed of alien and Neanderthal. This idea was explored, although not endorsed, by Carl Sagan in a paper presented in 1962 at a meeting of the American Rocket Society and subsequently published in the journal *Planetary and Space Science* in 1963. Titled 'Direct contact among galactic civilizations by relativistic interstellar spaceflight', the paper explored the

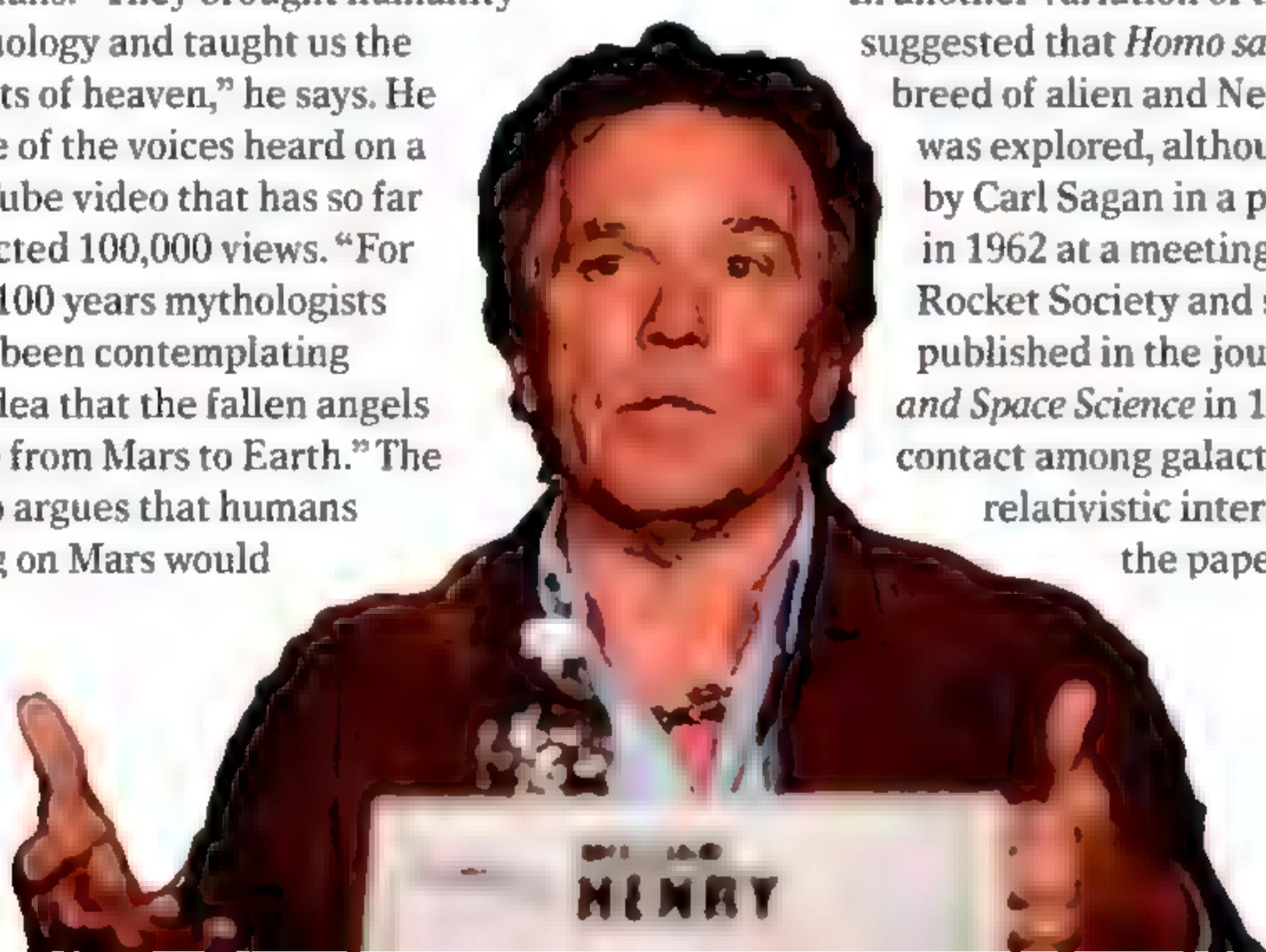
feasibility of interstellar voyages from other worlds and cautiously considered the possibility of extraterrestrial contact with Earth in the past.

But wherever they came from, what happened to the Nephilim? If they truly existed and then survived the flood, where might they be now? Are they hiding in our own DNA? Perhaps we should we go back to Enoch for clues.

## ENOCH'S ANGELS

Enoch has an intriguing passage which suggests that the fallen angels so displeased God that he had them bound, waiting for Judgement Day when they will be finally punished. The New Testament Book of Revelation describes what will happen to them at the end of time. Meanwhile, they are imprisoned on Earth and when Enoch describes his travels we discover where they are:

"I saw the path of the angels. I perceived at the extremity of the earth the firmament of heaven above it. Then I passed on towards the south... And there I saw a place on the other side of an extended territory, where waters were collected... I likewise beheld terrestrial fountains, deep in the fiery columns of heaven... And in the columns of heaven I beheld fires, which descended without number, but neither on high, nor into the deep. Over these fountains also I perceived a place which had neither the firmament of heaven above it, nor the solid ground underneath it; neither was there water above it, nor anything on wing; but the spot was desolate. And there I beheld seven stars, like great blazing mountains, and like spirits entreating me. Then the angel said, This place, until the consummation of heaven and earth,





ABOVE LEFT: Author LA Marzulli has his own theories about the Nephilim and their impact on human civilisation. ABOVE RIGHT: Steven Ben-Nun, meanwhile, believes the biblical giants to be imprisoned in the region of Mount Vinson in Antarctica, where a giant staircase (inset) has supposedly been seen in satellite images. BELOW: The 2017 film *Nephilim* featured a fallen angel called Azazel planning to create a new race of evil Nephilim that would subjugate all humanity.



will be the prison of the stars, and the host of heaven. The stars which roll over fire are those which transgressed the commandment of God before their time arrived; for they came not in their proper season. Therefore was He offended with them, and bound them, until the period of the consummation of their crimes in the secret year.”<sup>8</sup>

There has been much speculation as to where this place described by Enoch might be. His journeys are said to describe real places – it has been said that in one passage he appears to have visited Stonehenge, and even identified its latitude. In the context of the angels, the fiery columns of Heaven are said to refer to the volcanic activity around the Pacific Rim in South America; from there, Enoch crosses the ocean to the desolation of Antarctica.

The conjecture broadcast by Steven Ben-Nun from the online channel Israeli News Live was that the evil host of Heaven is imprisoned in the region of Mount Vinson, the continent’s highest mountain. He believes he has matched features of the physical geography of the area with Enoch’s description.<sup>9</sup> So somewhere beneath the ice of the Earth’s southernmost continent there are supernatural giants in chains awaiting punishment!

More recently, such theories were given added impetus by claims that satellite images had shown a giant staircase cut into an Antarctic hillside. British tabloid newspaper the *Sun* published speculation that the staircase had been built by either the Nephilim or by aliens from another world. The paper quoted one on-line conspiracy theorist who thought it must have been the fallen angels as it showed ‘Strictly high-tech demonic activity’.<sup>10</sup>

The *Sun* expanded on the theme of the ice continent being the centre of many conspiracy theories over the years. It reported on rumours that the US Navy had led a mission to investigate several mysteries. “This expedition was called Operation High Jump, which conspiracy theorists believe was an attempt to find the entrance to a secret world hidden underneath Earth.”

#### LAND OF THE GIANTS

Another theory about the fate of the Nephilim is less mystical, but equally strange. LA Marzulli is the author of *The Nephilim Trilogy* and believes he has identified a massive cover-up of the evidence of what he believes are the remains of the biblical giants – hoaxed photos of which continue to do the Internet rounds every year.

His suggestion is that the Nephilim came to America and were responsible for building some large structures that can be seen, abandoned, to this day. “When the first white settlers came into The Great Circle Mound in Ohio, they asked the Native Americans living there... Who built this? The natives replied that they didn’t know who built them, as these large mounds were there and abandoned when they arrived. Some posited the mounds were built by an unknown lost tribe of people, who migrated, perhaps, from the Old World. Others thought they could be one of the lost tribes of Israel.”<sup>11</sup>

Myths, legends and folklore are often thought to contain elements of historic fact, although distorted over time as stories are relayed orally from generation to generation. The Jewish legend that there were once offspring of mortal and heavenly beings living on the Earth finds echoes in similar stories from other unrelated cultures. There are the Hindu stories of the Daitya, offspring

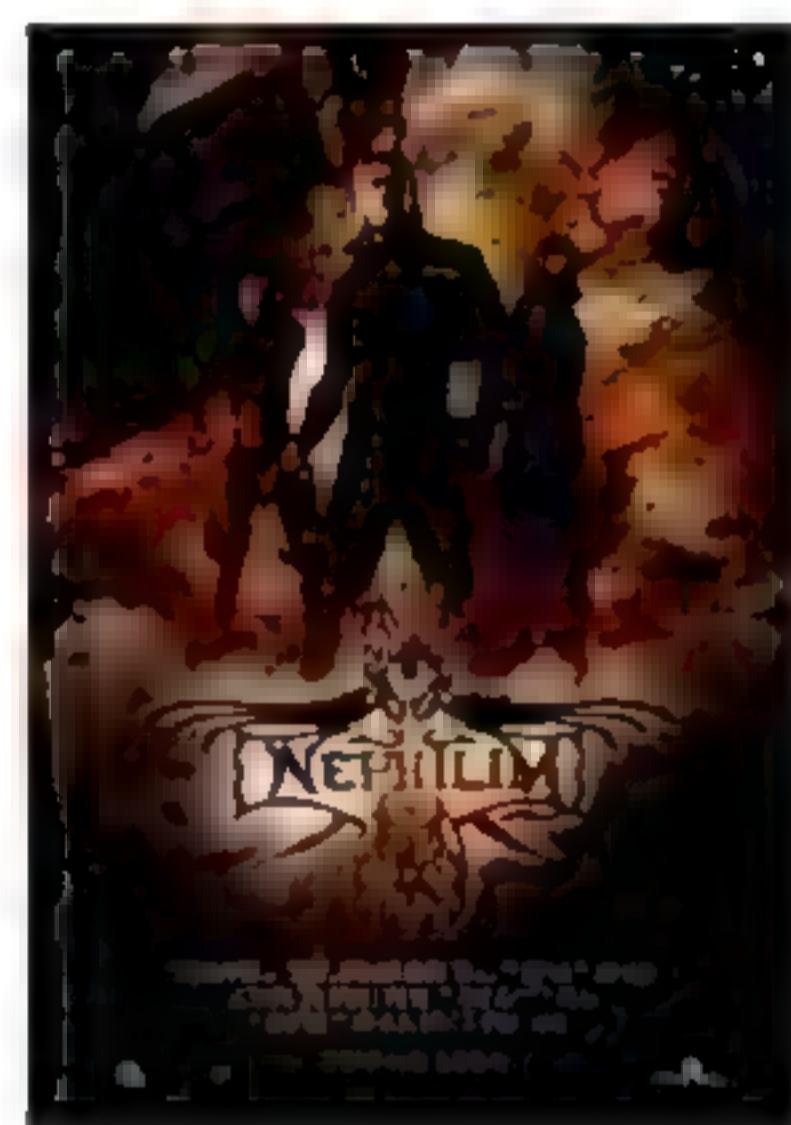
of a revered sage and a goddess. The ancient Greek myths have several references to Gods falling in love with beautiful human women. And tales of giants are found in Celtic, Norse, Native American and Tibetan legends, as well as in children’s books and fairy stories. Similarly, in several cultures there are stories of great floods.

The same stories become archetypes and are recycled by film makers, fantasy writers and the makers of videogames. There is a human fascination with the idea that even if the world today is mundane, its people and animals relatively under-sized, there was once a time when everything was more extraordinary – and much larger. The dinosaurs are long dead, but they live on in books, films, pictures and toys. The Nephilim too, although there is no proof they ever existed, continue to have a real presence in our collective imagination.

#### NOTES

- [1 diablo.fandom.com](http://diablo.fandom.com)
- [2 From the Jehovah’s Witnesses website jw.org](http://jw.org)
- [3 biblicalarchaeology.org](http://biblicalarchaeology.org)
- [4 JR Porter, \*The New Illustrated Companion to the Bible\*, Watkins, 2003, p26.](http://www.bible.com/111/jer.1.14)
- [5 Good News Translation.](http://www.bible.com/111/sep.1.1)
- [6 Book of Enoch, Chapter 6.](http://www.bible.com/111/sep.1.1)
- [7 Ancient Aliens: Were Mythical Fallen Angels Actually Martians? www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhsgs5996Q4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhsgs5996Q4)
- [8 Book of Enoch 18, 7-16](http://www.bible.com/111/sep.1.1)
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- [10 Sun, 10 Jan 2017.](http://www.bible.com/111/sep.1.1)
- [11 lamarzulli.net.](http://www.bible.com/111/sep.1.1)

• TED HARRISON is a writer, artist and film-maker. A former religious affairs correspondent for the BBC, he has been a regular contributor to *Fortean Times* for many years. His books include *The Death and Resurrection of Elvis Presley* (Reaktion, 2016).



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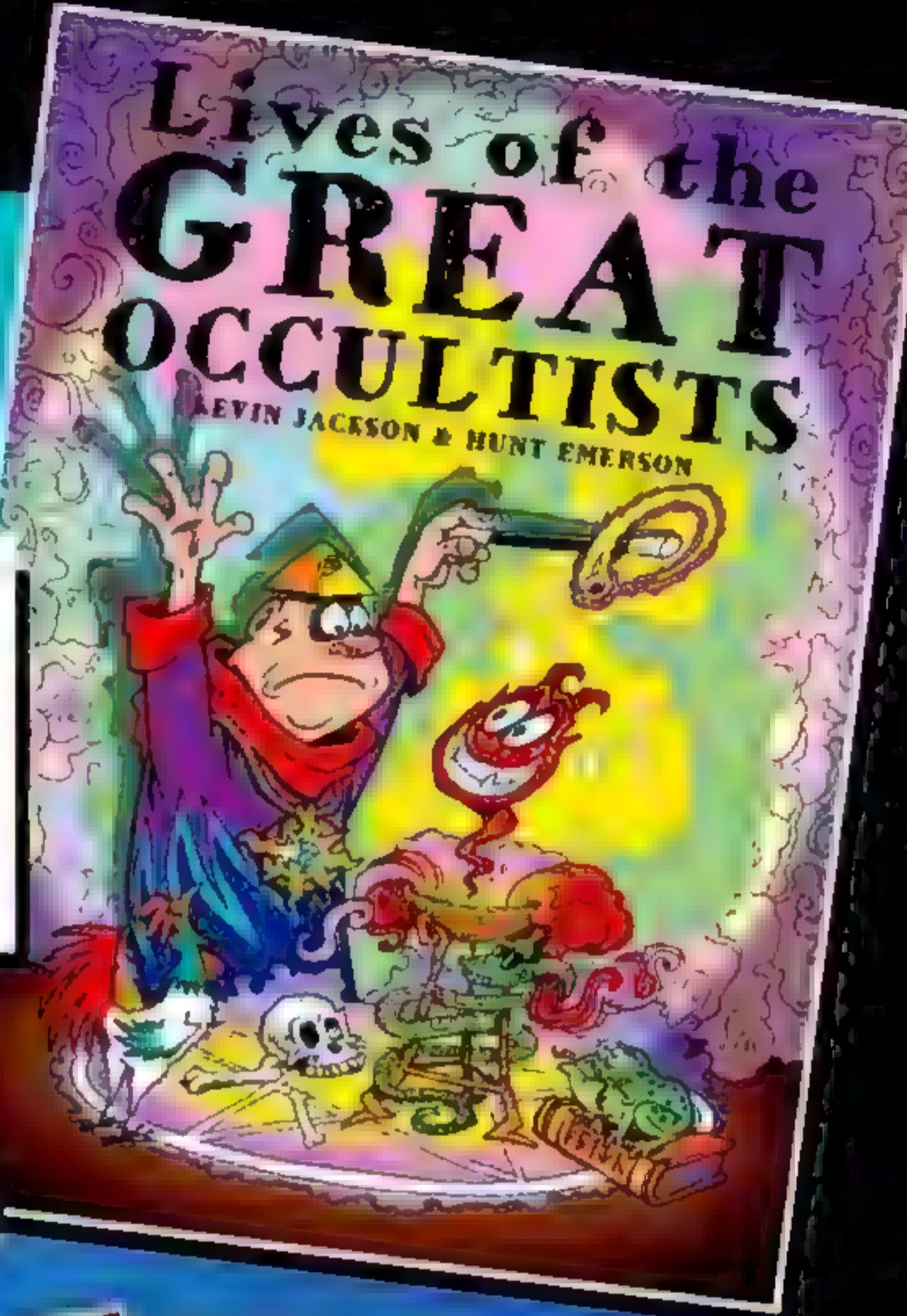
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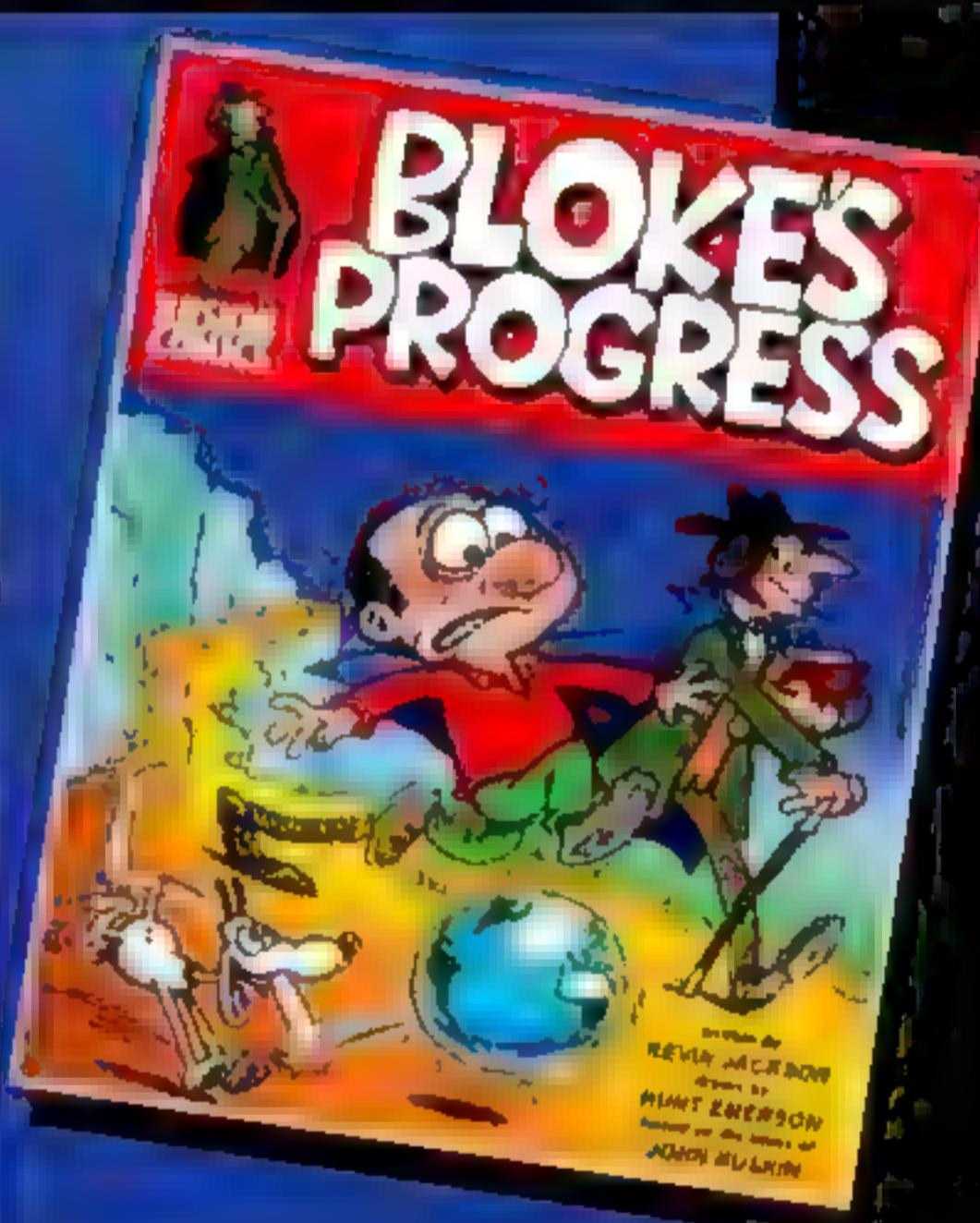
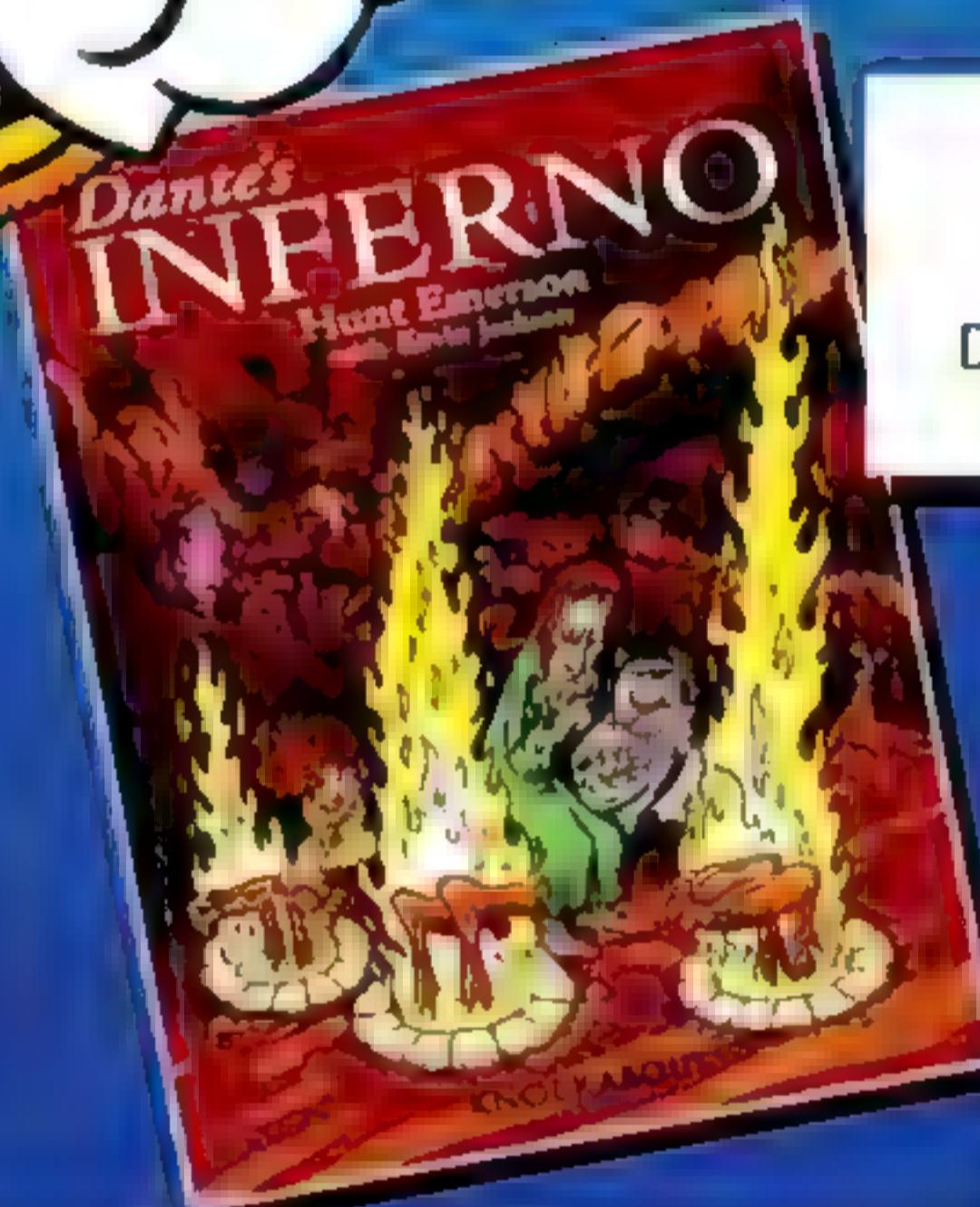
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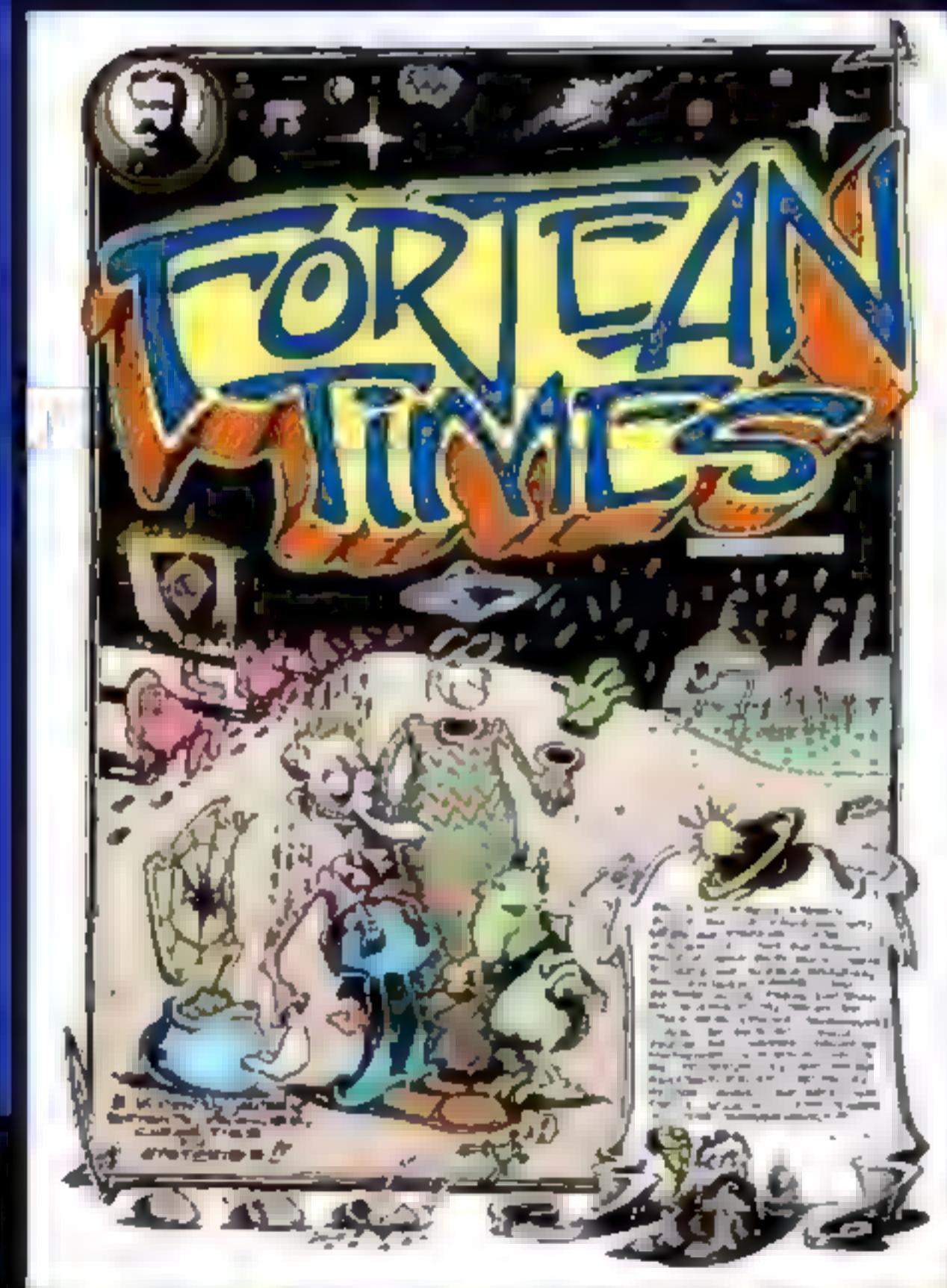


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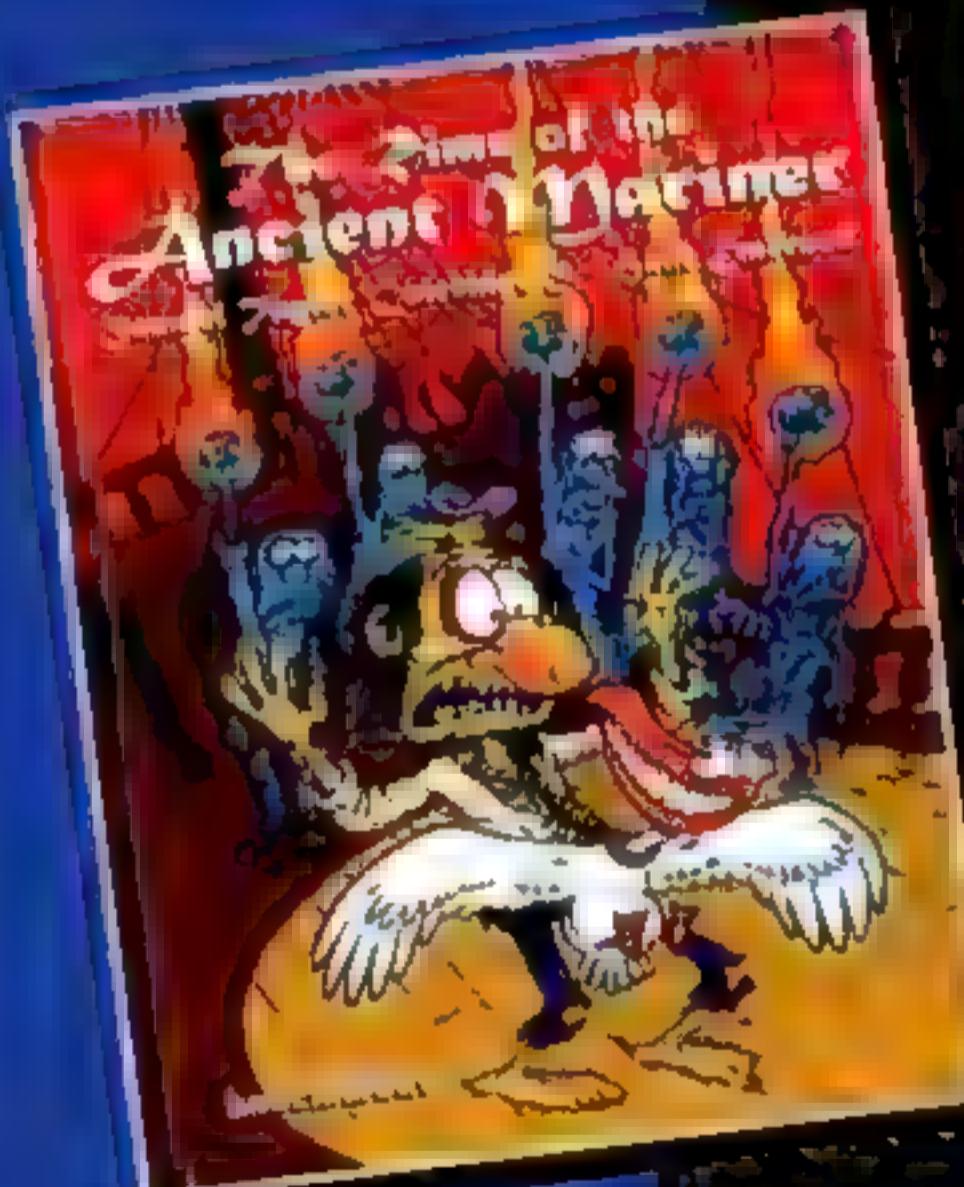
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## ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE

In search of the crooked general who lost a leg in history's ultimate food-fight, SD TUCKER follows in the footsteps of a master of Magical Realism, finding in Latin America a region so full of mad dictators that the boundaries between fact and fiction begin to blur.

A plague hits a remote village, leading to total memory-loss among its inhabitants... a baby with the tail of a pig is eaten alive by ants... an orphan knocks on a door, carrying a bag filled with her parents' jumbled bones. These are not random events culled from old back-issues of *FT*, but plot developments in one of the novels of Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), patron saint of the literary movement known as Magical Realism, in which absurd or supernatural events intrude upon everyday life as a matter of course. In 1982, the Colombian Márquez won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and gave his opinion that 'Magical Realism' was really just another form of 'Realism' – within a Latin American context, at least. The Land of Eldorado's real-life history was often more unbelievable than were his own tales of wild fantasy, and his literary compatriots' main problem, Márquez stated in his Nobel acceptance speech, was that "we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of means to render our [real] lives believable."<sup>1</sup> Another genre of literature to which Márquez contributed was the so-called 'Dictator Novel', in which the lives of the many military strongmen who have ruled so much of the area down the years were explored, whether realistically or otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

Following the Spanish Empire's retreat from the continent between around 1810 and 1830, much of South and Central America descended into a prolonged period of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary chaos and bloodshed. Such a climate proved perfect for the rise of a new – and sadly enduring – type of national leader, the *caudillo*, or military dictator. Márquez considered these figures, all-powerful gods in human form and full-dress uniform, to be Latin America's greatest contribution to world mythology; strange, almost fairytale figures whose often incredible antics deserved to be remembered, no matter how evil they may have been. To illustrate his point, during his Nobel speech, Márquez reminded his audience briefly of three of the very strangest *caudillos* of all. Over the



LEFT: General Antonio López de Santa Anna portrayed on the battlefield in the early 1820s. BELOW LEFT: Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez is all smiles after hearing he's been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.



next three articles, let us take each of these figures in turn, and try to sift the men from the myth – if such a thing is even possible.

### ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO

"I've got nothing against your right leg... trouble is, neither have you"; so said Peter Cook to Dudley Moore's one-legged actor applying for the part of Tarzan in a classic episode of *Not Only But Also*. Perhaps the monopod Moore should instead have sought to fill the less physically challenging role of Márquez's first great dictator, General Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794-1876), whose own peg-legged nature proved to be a genuine career asset, rather than leaving him the lame duck you might presume. According to

Márquez's Nobel speech, Santa Anna, "three times dictator of Mexico, held a magnificent funeral for the right leg he had lost in the so-called 'Pastry War'." Sadly, as you might expect of such a ridiculous statement, this claim was somewhat inaccurate; it was, of course, Santa Anna's *left* leg which he lost and had ostentatiously buried as a result of a brutal military conflict over pastry-products, not his right one.

Best known for his defeat of Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and other such legendary Texan rebels at the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, the 'Napoleon of the West' served as President of Mexico on no fewer than 11 separate occasions between 1833 and 1855, sometimes as dictator, sometimes as democrat, but always as a shameless political opportunist. An insight into Santa Anna's character can be gleaned from the fact that he twice married girls under the age of 16 and then didn't even bother to turn up to the wedding ceremonies, authorising proxies to stand in for him, eager only to

receive a rich dowry from each child's well-off father. The only one of his weddings that Santa Anna ever deigned to actually attend was a fake one; a story is told of a 17-year-old girl named Melchora Barrera to whom the General took a fancy, but who refused to give in to his advances unless he agreed to marry her. Santa Anna consented, and did what appeared to be the honourable thing – until it subsequently transpired that the 'priest' who had carried out the ceremony was one of his own troops in disguise, thus rendering the nuptials wholly void.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, this was a man willing to adopt almost any temporary stance to get on in life. Following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, the confused climate of coup and counter-coup suited the ambitions of a protean strongman like Santa Anna well, but he had been forced to retire from public life in disgrace following the ultimate success of the Texan rebellion, which saw that territory gain its independence from Mexico even in spite of the Alamo's loss. In 1838, however, Santa Anna saw his chance for redemption.

A pastry-chef known to history only as 'Monsieur Remontel' claimed that a gang of Mexican army officers had looted his shop on the outskirts of Mexico City of all its valuable sausage rolls, jam tarts and vanilla slices, vandalising the place as they went. Even though his shop and its contents were realistically valued at no more than 1,000 pesos, Remontel made an official complaint to the French King, Louis-Philippe, over-valuing his shop at an absurd 60,000 pesos, enough to live off for life. Having various other grievances against Mexico, the French took Remontel's complaint into account and demanded payment of 600,000 pesos from the Mexican government as compensation for accumulated financial slights allegedly made against France and her citizens abroad. When Mexico refused to pay, French warships began blockading and bombarding Mexican ports, and war was declared between the countries – Pastry War! The newly-free Texans then helped worsen the blockade by preventing vital pastry-making ingredients such as flour from passing south of the border, thus leaving the poor Mexican people unable even to eat cake; the conflict is actually known as 'The War of the Cakes' in Spanish. General Santa Anna spied his opportunity for rehabilitation, and so the alleged 'Saviour of the Motherland', as he was now calling himself, took up arms again, leading his troops into battle at the



LEFT: Santa Anna's legendary leg, now housed in the Illinois State Military Museum..

by those who had had enough of his rivals' reign. With the national coffers near empty and the country in a mess, this time the General was to rule Mexico his own way, as an outright dictator, rather than a supposed democrat, as he had done previously. After all, by losing his leg for his country, he had surely earned the right to govern the land as he saw fit? To hammer this message home, Santa Anna had his lost leg disinterred, intending to parade it before crowds of onlookers. Sadly, it looked a bit worse for wear after so long underground, and the newly-restored *El Presidente* had it sealed within an ornate crystal urn and then placed within a small coffin before the parade began; no doubt the risk of a stray dog running off with his blessed bones was just too great to take.

At 11 o'clock on the morning of 27 September 1842, a huge religious procession began to wind its way through the Mexican capital, stopping only when it reached the Santa Paula Cemetery. Shaded from the sun by veils, top army and government officials led the parade, followed by a group of military pallbearers carrying the sacred leg in its coffin on some kind of display-platform. Two regiments of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, and a detachment of artillery followed behind. When it reached the graveyard, the procession halted before a brand-new mausoleum which had been constructed: a kind of large vertical column, intended to hold the General's leg. A Mexican flag flapped away atop the monument, and a real-life cannon was built into it, too, illustrating how the leg was lost. Fawning eulogies, prayers and poetry were read to the hallowed limb by various prominent figures, before the leg in its urn was locked away inside the structure by the War Minister while Santa Anna looked approvingly on. Following festivities and fireworks, the military then gave their own personal salute to the glorious appendage by firing off salvos from their assembled ordnance.

However, despite appearances, all was not well with Santa Anna's leg. Elements within the Catholic Church objected to the burial as an obscene parody, and it was rumoured that the cemetery's dead were united in ghostly rebellion against the humiliating idea of being ruled over by a severed leg. Ignoring such rumblings, once again Santa Anna invaded Texas and tried raising domestic taxes to refill

## HE INTENDED TO PARADE THE LEG BEFORE CROWDS OF ONLOOKERS

captured port-city of Veracruz, where on 5 February 1839 a volley from an enemy cannon hit him, shattering his ankle and requiring the amputation of his left leg, a sacrifice which seemed in vain. Mexico soon caved in, agreed to French demands, and the rather pointless clash ended with the withdrawal of French troops on 9 March.<sup>4</sup>

### A DEAD LEG

However, the loss of Santa Anna's limb proved the making of him politically. Craftily turning his disability into an asset, General Santa Anna transformed himself into a national hero by creating a new, quasi-religious nationalist cult around his severed leg. Aware of the old Catholic tradition of venerating the body parts of Saints as holy relics, Santa Anna kept hold of his bloody limb and decided to transform it into a holy relic, too, tapping into strongly Catholic Mexico's traditions for his own gain.

Initially, the lost leg spent four years buried away safely at Santa Anna's hacienda near Veracruz, until late 1841 when he was asked to take up the Presidency once again



the Mexican Treasury (which he himself often plundered). However, both measures succeeded only in enflaming public opinion against him further, and in 1844 statues of Santa Anna were toppled across Mexico City. Worse, the monument to his leg was assaulted and ransacked, with the severed limb itself being smashed from its crystal urn and dragged through the streets on a rope by a baying mob chanting "Death to the cripple!"<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Peter Cook, it turned out the people of Mexico did have something against their leader's leg, after all; yet again, Santa Anna was forced to cede power to others. A *décima* (Mexican broadside or street-ballad) from the time provides a punning insight into the level of public disillusionment with the one-time all-powerful *caudillo*:

*At other times this foot  
was earnestly respected;  
but that was when its owner  
still held us in subjugation.  
Today, the people have treated it  
like a dirty old bone,  
because the nation no longer  
wishes to stand for it.*<sup>6</sup>

## LEGENDS OF THE LEG'S END

Santa Anna himself was also no longer able to stand without the aid of an artificial limb, opting to have two top-of-the-range wood-and-cork ones made for him in New York, at a cost of \$1,300; each came with a black jackboot attached to the prosthesis itself via ball-bearings at the ankle, thus allowing the foot to swivel. The surgeon had left a length of Santa Anna's bone protruding from his thigh during amputation, so the wooden legs really had to be bespoke ones. So impressive was his main specially commissioned prosthesis that Santa Anna was known to wave the thing around over his head while riding on parade, to rally his troops or remind citizens of his sacrifice.

Strangely, Santa Anna's favourite fake limb has fared rather better than his real fleshy one ever did in terms of its status as a quasi-relic, being currently on display behind glass in the Illinois Military Museum, Springfield, where it is accorded revered status as the star attraction. But how did it arrive there?

In 1847, the General's wooden leg was captured as spoils of war by the 4th

Regiment of Illinois Volunteers after the Battle of Cerro Gordo during the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, a re-run of old enmities in which Santa Anna had once again chosen to fight. Legend has it that the unfortunate General fled the field of action on a donkey after being surprised by a raiding party of US troops, in his panic leaving behind \$18,000 in gold, an uneaten roast-chicken and two left legs, one of the valuable bespoke ones and a simple spare wooden peg. Reputedly, the gleeful American troops stole Santa Anna's gold, ate his chicken, and played a game of baseball with his cheaper limb as the bat. His main false leg was kept for posterity, which is how it came to repose in Springfield's Military Museum.<sup>7</sup>

In the early 1980s Santa Anna's peg leg was reported to have been re-found, too, and is now displayed at the Governor Oglesby Mansion in Decatur, Illinois. However, the leg appears to be just a standard antique medical item, and could really have belonged to anyone. Nonetheless, if you want to travel to the Mansion in order to stare at a random prosthesis displayed behind glass, then you can.<sup>8</sup>



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

TOP: "Genl. Santa Anna & Canalizo retiring with disgust from Cerro Gordo" in a contemporary print. The General's prosthetic leg (and his wooden spare) had been captured by American troops. FACING PAGE: Santa Anna photographed in 1853, two years before he was forced into exile from Mexico for the next two decades.

## THE GAME IS AFOOT

Dubious legends about Santa Anna's leg now have a life of their own. Was it really used to play baseball, for instance? One version of the story has it that the leg was appropriated by US General Abner Doubleday, the supposed inventor of baseball itself, and used by him to stage the first ever ball game held in Mexico, which served to introduce the sport to the natives. Given that Doubleday has since been shown not to have invented baseball after all, such tales can probably be chalked up as blackly humorous myths.<sup>9</sup>

Today, possession of the main captured limb is subject to a tug-of-war (sadly not literally) between Illinois and Texas; Texans say their nemesis's limb belongs on display in the Alamo, while Illinois folk are keen to give such claims the boot. Confusingly, it is often said that Mexico also want their former cruel and corrupt dictator's leg back, despite this being the rough equivalent of Angela Merkel requesting the return of Hitler's missing gonad. Santa Anna is not too popular in Mexico these days, due to the massive amounts of territory he lost (or occasionally sold) during his constant wars against the Yankees; Texas, Utah, California, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado and New Mexico, all were surrendered to Washington, in total or in part. Following American entry into WWII, Illinois did propose donating the leg to Mexico in the name of "hemispheric solidarity" against fascism, but the offer came to naught.

It turns out that Santa Anna's other bespoke prosthesis is already on display in a Mexico City museum anyway, and so his countrymen are in no pressing need of two left feet. However, in 1998 an episode of the likeable Texas-set cartoon series *King of the Hill* called 'The Final Shinsult' featured a plot-line in which the characters took a rare break from selling propane and propane accessories to kidnap Santa Anna's leg from its museum, for reasons both complex and unlikely. The episode featured a fake plea at the end, with a voice-over begging people to "join the movement to help return the leg to the Mexican people", which was apparently taken seriously by some of the show's more simple-minded viewers, who contacted the



Mexican Embassy for further details. No spot of light body-snatching was actually required of them, though.<sup>10</sup>

Following further embarrassing military and political escapades, Santa Anna was forced into exile from Mexico from 1855 onwards. While banished in New York and seeking cash to fund yet another tilt at power, he became the first man to introduce a rudimentary form of chewing gum to the US, in the form of the product's base ingredient *chicle*; sadly, he mis-developed the gum as a possible cheaper alternative to rubber-tyres as opposed to a confectionary item. Selling on surplus supplies to his inventive secretary Thomas Adams, Santa Anna was surprised to see Adams add flavouring to the stuff and start telling people to put it in their mouths, not on their carriage-wheels, thereby creating a new taste sensation.<sup>11</sup> Santa Anna never made a cent from the new fad and, tried in *absentia* for treason once the extent of his depletion of the national coffers became known, there seemed no way back to his homeland. In 1874, however, Santa Anna took advantage of a general amnesty to hop back across the border where, virtually blind and penniless, he lived a short time longer before dying in Mexico City on 21 June 1876, aged 82. He was then buried, with full military honours, in a glass coffin in the Panteón de Tepeyac Cemetery.<sup>12</sup> If anyone wants to dig him up

and sell him to the Texas Tourist-Board, I'm sure he's still there.

**NEXT TIME:** 'The Body of Christ'. Meet the second of Gabriel García Márquez's curious *caudillos*; the saintly moving corpse of Ecuador whose death was predicted by the Virgin Mary and caused by Freemasons.

### NOTES

**1** Speech online at [www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html); all subsequent Márquez quotes are taken from here.

**2** Hoping to make his own novels more realistic, Márquez himself used to submit early drafts to his good friend Fidel Castro to read; the Cuban dictator then passed them back, annotated with no doubt highly accurate advice about what calibre bullets would be used by certain characters, and other such vital matters of personal dictatorial experience. See [www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/06/fidel-castro-worked-on-gabriel-garcia-marquez-manuscripts](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/06/fidel-castro-worked-on-gabriel-garcia-marquez-manuscripts)

**3** See [http://daccrossley.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2013/01/santa-annas-other-mistress.html](http://daccrossley.typepad.com/my_weblog/2013/01/santa-annas-other-mistress.html) for a typical modern-day retelling of the tale in its most elaborate form; <http://alamostudies.proboards.com/thread/60> has informed discussion as to what extent this was actually a true story – there are certainly plenty of variants.

**4** [www.history.com/news/the-pastry-war-175-years-ago](http://www.history.com/news/the-pastry-war-175-years-ago); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastry\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastry_War).

**5** Shannon Baker, 'Antonio López de Santa Anna's Search for Personalised Nationalism' in Samuel Brunk & Ben Fallow (eds) *Heroes and Hero-Cults in Latin America*, University of Texas Press, 2006, pp.67-70; account also online at [www.dsloan.com/Auctions/A23/item-santa-anna-leg-1842.html](http://www.dsloan.com/Auctions/A23/item-santa-anna-leg-1842.html). In thus appropriating Catholicism, Santa Anna was actually only following his political predecessors' good example. See [www.huichawaii.org/assets/baker.-shannon-l.-federalists.-traditionalists-and-santanistas.pdf](http://www.huichawaii.org/assets/baker.-shannon-l.-federalists.-traditionalists-and-santanistas.pdf).

**6** Some *décimas* devoted to this subject are online at <http://inside.sfuhs.org/dept/history/Mexicoreader/Chapter4/poemssantaannaleg.html>. Feel free to insert your own joke about metrical feet here, by the way.

**7** [www.latinamericanstudies.org/mex-war/santa-anna-leg.htm](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mex-war/santa-anna-leg.htm); <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/public-displays-santa-annas-life-and-limb/Contact?oid=902666>.

**8** [http://herald-review.com/news/local/oglesby-mansion-may-be-home-to-one-of-santa-anna/article\\_50390e9a-c43b-50a5-9ca4-81f53ad86010.html](http://herald-review.com/news/local/oglesby-mansion-may-be-home-to-one-of-santa-anna/article_50390e9a-c43b-50a5-9ca4-81f53ad86010.html).

**9** For a typical retelling of the baseball legend, see <http://votto1234.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/antonio-lopez-de-santa-anna-his-wooden.html>.

**10** [www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/public-displays-santa-annas-life-and-limb/Contact?oid=902666](http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/public-displays-santa-annas-life-and-limb/Contact?oid=902666); [www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2016/11/02/illinois-holds-fast-santa-annas-leg-texas-never-surrenders](http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2016/11/02/illinois-holds-fast-santa-annas-leg-texas-never-surrenders); [www.roadsideamerica.com/story/18808](http://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/18808); [http://kingofthehill.wikia.com/wiki/The\\_Final\\_Shinsult](http://kingofthehill.wikia.com/wiki/The_Final_Shinsult); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio\\_López\\_de\\_Santa\\_Ann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_López_de_Santa_Ann).

**11** [www.uh.edu/engines/epi1963.htm](http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi1963.htm); <http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/6-things-you-may-not-know-about-santa-anna>.

**12** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio\\_López\\_de\\_Santa\\_Ann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_López_de_Santa_Ann).

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## Extraordinary claims...

**ANDREW MAY** argues that Carl Sagan's famous quotation isn't quite the sceptical mantra it's usually thought to be...

**I**n his 1980 TV series *Cosmos*, Carl Sagan famously said of UFOs that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." The phrase has become something of a mantra for sceptics everywhere. That bastion of the status quo, Wikipedia – which handily refers to it by the acronym ECREE – has even elevated it to a fundamental philosophical principle, called the "Sagan Standard".<sup>1</sup> As a five-word soundbite, however, it's pretty meaningless. In its original context it simply expresses Sagan's view that UFOs don't exist.

Yet if we trace it back to its roots, ECREE has a precise mathematical meaning – and it was first used to oppose dogmatic scepticism, not to support it. Whether Sagan knew it or not, he was paraphrasing a passage in *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, published in 1814 by the brilliant polymath Pierre-Simon Laplace. Often referred to as the "French Newton", Laplace was years ahead of his time, speculating on everything from black holes to the idea that mass extinctions are caused by cometary impacts. And unlike Newton, Laplace's calculations showed the Solar System to be stable even without the intervention of an all-powerful deity. "I had no need of that hypothesis," he's reputed to have told Napoleon.

The *Essay on Probabilities* was ahead of its time too, dealing with the now-trendy topic of Bayesian inference.<sup>2</sup> Using a theorem originally formulated in the mid-1700s by the Reverend Thomas Bayes, it was only when Laplace rediscovered it that its



ABOVE: The brilliant Pierre-Simon Laplace rediscovered Bayes's theorem.

full potential was recognised – and it wasn't until the age of digital computers that it became a common tool in scientific circles.

Bayes's formula shows how the odds of a theory being correct shorten as evidence is accumulated in its favour, or lengthen as evidence mounts up against it. In this context, Laplace's essay refers to two of the hot fortean topics of his day: animal magnetism (a reiki-like healing therapy) and dowsing for metals or running water. While he acknowledges that the evidence for such phenomena may be equivocal, he has no time for knee-jerk sceptics who dismiss them out of hand: "It is natural to think that the action of these causes is very feeble, and that it may be easily disturbed by accidental circumstances; thus because in some cases it is not manifested at all its existence ought not to be denied. We are so far from recognising all the agents of nature and their diverse modes of action that it would be unphilosophical to deny the phenomena solely because they

are inexplicable in the present state of our knowledge."

This is where Laplace's version of ECREE comes in: "We ought to examine them with an attention as much the more scrupulous as it appears the more difficult to admit them." But unlike Carl Sagan (or Wikipedia), he doesn't simply offer this as a blunt, take-it-or-leave-it aphorism. He proposes a rational, mathematical way to deal with such situations: "The calculation of probabilities becomes indispensable in determining to just what point it is necessary to multiply the observations, or the experiences, in order to obtain in favour of the agents which they indicate."

In other words, Bayes's theorem tells you how much evidence you need to accumulate before an "extraordinary claim" becomes the most viable explanation. Here's a simple textbook example that shows how the principle works.<sup>3</sup> A witness sees a night-time hit-and-run accident involving a taxi cab, which they say is blue. But there's only one blue taxi in the city, the other

99 cabs being black. Without the witness statement, the odds against the guilty cab being blue are 99 to 1, making it an "extraordinary claim". On the other hand, tests show the witness can correctly identify the colour of a car, under similar lighting conditions, nine times out of 10. Does this mean there's a 90 per cent chance the cab really was blue, and only 10 per cent that it was black? No, because that ignores the original 99/1 odds against blue. Bayes's theorem says that, in light of the witness testimony, you have to multiply these odds by the ratio of 10 per cent to 90 per cent – which still gives relatively long odds of 11/1.

So that single witness isn't enough to confirm the "extraordinary claim" of a blue cab. On the other hand, if there were three independent witnesses, all equally reliable and all maintaining that the cab was blue, it would swing things the other way, making blue the 11/81 odds-on favourite.<sup>4</sup> As far as Laplace was concerned, this would be sufficient "extraordinary evidence" to clinch the matter.

Unfortunately, you can't apply analogous reasoning to the extraterrestrial visitors Carl Sagan was referring to, because you can't assign meaningful odds to them. Either there's evidence for them – evidence that stands up to scrutiny – or there isn't. But if he'd put it that way, no one would have remembered the quotation.

### NOTES

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sagan\\_standard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sagan_standard)

2 For the full text, see <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/58881>

3 Adapted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representativeness\\_heuristic#The\\_taxicab\\_problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representativeness_heuristic#The_taxicab_problem)

4 Just do the multiplication three times instead of once.

◆ **ANDREW MAY** is a regular contributor to *FT* whose recent books include *Rockets and Ray Guns* and *Astrobiology: The Search for Life Elsewhere in the Universe*.

## Of paintings and portals

**DEAN BALLINGER** looks at one of Salvador Dalí's late paintings and asks if it contains clues that the artist was an initiate of a secret esoteric society.

In 1965, Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) produced one of the major works of his late career. *The Railway Station at Perpignan* is a massive painting (2.95m x 4.6m/9ft8in x 15ft), which appears to depict a transcendent vision of some kind. At the centre of the composition is a Greek cross, superimposed over the translucent head and torso of a crucified Christ. The central point where the vertical and horizontal arms of the cross meet has been rendered as a square, resplendent with a celestial gold. Four rays of golden light shine from each corner of the square to the corresponding corner of the canvas, giving the impression that we are looking at a doorway into Heaven or some other empyrean realm. The figure of Dalí himself is depicted, from a feet-first perspective, being uplifted or sucked into the doorway, with the same figure repeating at the top of the image, above a railway carriage looming out of the canvas above the top of Christ's head. The rest of the canvas consists of a wispy cloudscape of golden brown, within which a variety of other figures and objects are positioned, notably (on the left and right sides) the figures of the praying man and woman from Jean-François Millet's 1859 painting *The Angelus*, a Dalian obsession that was referenced in many of his works.

For most viewers and critics, this painting can be readily interpreted as a representative piece from a period in which Dalí was explicitly engaging with religious, particularly Catholic,



THE ARCHIVES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Dalí's *La Gare de Perpignan* ('The Railway Station at Perpignan'), 1965. BELOW: Dalí arrives by bicycle at the Rue de Rivoli to deliver paintings for an exhibition in Paris, November 1967.

iconography (examples include *The Sacrament of the Last Supper* (1955) and *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus* (1958-1959). However, Dalí himself explained the painting as an expression of a genuine mystical experience he had undergone at Perpignan station in the 1960s. The backstory to this experience lies in the late 1940s, when Dalí and his wife/muse Gala returned to Spain after several years living in the USA. A proud Catalonian, Dalí resettled in the provincial fishing village of Port Lligat, near the coastal town of Cadaques (his house there is now preserved as a tourist attraction). As the major French town closest to the Catalonian border, Perpignan became well-frequented by Dalí as a place where he could use the train to despatch his paintings to his art dealers in Paris, or occasionally despatch Gala and himself to the French capital in

*"The Universe is similar in its structure to Perpignan railway station"*



order to sample its delights. Over time, Dalí became aware that there was something creatively invigorating about the environs of Perpignan, especially its railway station. As described in his typically modest 1966 tome *Diary of a Genius*, "it is always at Perpignan station, when Gala is making arrangements for the paintings to follow us by train, that I have my most unique ideas. Even a few miles before this, at Boulou, my brain starts moving; but it is the arrival at Perpignan station that marks an absolute mental ejaculation which then reaches its greatest and most sublime speculative height." This creative high would stay with Dalí afterwards, declining relative to the distance he travelled away from the station. This trend reached an apotheosis on 19 September 1963, when Dalí had "a kind of ecstasy that was cosmogonic and even

stronger than preceding ones. The Universe, which is one of the most limited things that exist, is, all proportions being equal, similar in its structure to Perpignan railway station..." (sans the station's ticket office, which had been replaced in the vision by the image of an obscure sculpture which Dalí was fixated upon at the time).

By this stage of his career Dalí was an international artworld celebrity whose public image was that of an incorrigible mythomaniac proffering outrageous assertions about his life and work. The 'ecstasy at Perpignan' could therefore be readily dismissed as yet another example of Dalí's wacky theorising. This interpretation was reinforced by other public comments Dalí made on the subject, such as during a 1978 address to a major French art institute. Describing Perpignan railway station as "the gravitational centre of our Universe", Dalí argued that if it hadn't been for the geological heft of Perpignan as the pivot linking Spain to the rest of Europe during the aeons of continental drift, the Iberian peninsula would have "drifted to Australia and [the Spanish] would now be living amongst the kangaroos – the most dreadful thought conceivable..."

However, corroboration for Dalí's initial claim to have had a genuine mystical experience at Perpignan station is presented in the 'occult autobiographies' of British writer Patrice Chaplin. In *City of Secrets* (2007), Chaplin presented a new take on the Rennes-le-Château mythos. Eschewing the 'Priory of Sion' fabrications, Chaplin claimed that Bérenger Saunière was implicated in an esoteric society preserving Cabalistic knowledge, a society based in the mediæval Catalonian city of Girona (FT226:46-52). This premise is elaborated further in *The Portal* (2010), in which Chaplin describes undertaking an initiatory pilgrimage through a hidden 'sacred landscape' spanning Pyrenean France and Catalonian Spain (FT268:62-63). Chaplin's guide leads her on a convoluted route through 11 locations, beginning at Girona



ABOVE: Perpignan railway station, complete with a flying Dalí on the roof.

and ending at the Pyrenean peak of Mt Canigou, which corresponds to the positions of the stars in the constellation of the Great Bear. All of these locations are described as marking points of Earth energy that, in most instances, are strong enough to serve as portals to spiritual realms that co-exist with our mundane human reality. If suitably prepared – through training in occult disciplines like the Cabala, for example – an initiate can access these portals and undergo profound mystical experiences. Among other revelations, it is disclosed that Mt Canigou is the midway point in a north-south line of Earth energy connecting Rennes-le-Château to Girona; and that the tower built by Saunière in Rennes-le-Château was designed to complement an ancient one built in Girona, in order to enhance the spiritual energy of Canigou.

Upon arrival in Perpignan, location number 10 on the pilgrimage, Chaplin's guide brings up Dalí's experience: "It seemed that here Dalí had experienced another place altogether. He had quite inadvertently stepped into another time and space, and it affected him profoundly, as one might expect. He spoke of an apocalyptic vision" – one that he put into his work (whether this included paintings other than *The Railway Station at Perpignan* is not specified). In the ensuing

discussion, it is implied that Dalí's artistic sensitivity, combined with his deep identification with the Catalonian landscape, had rendered him receptive enough to 'tune in' to the mystical energy of Perpignan and, through the portal there, experience a vision of the centre of the Universe: the kind of ineffable 'cosmic consciousness' experience that can perhaps only be adequately conveyed through a non-text-based medium like painting. The guide reveals that she had personally known Dalí during this period, and had suggested he visit location number eight, the village of Perillos, north of Perpignan, which had long been deserted due to the negative energy of the area perpetually unsettling the inhabitants in forms such as recurring collective nightmares. The guide's description of Dalí's experience of Perillos – that he was deeply disturbed by the feeling of the place and came away from it "completely changed", the "layers of reality and dimensions" of the location being something that affected him for the rest of his life – can perhaps be read as indicating that Dalí had other experiences of landscape mysticism alongside his Perpignan vision (albeit, in this instance, of a less beneficent nature).

These revelations led Chaplin to surmise that Dalí was not just a sensitive but an initiate: someone who had undergone the ritual

training in the sacred wisdom of the area. In both books, Chaplin states that the region has long attracted artists and writers, many of whom have become affiliated with the esoteric group responsible for safeguarding its occult knowledge. A notable figure in this respect was the French filmmaker and poet Jean Cocteau, who met the teenage Chaplin in Girona in the 1950s, and who she also believes was one of the participants in a ritual she stumbled upon at the time. (Cocteau was also appropriated by Pierre Plantard as one of the 'Grand Masters' in his Priory of Sion hoax; FT212:44-50). Chaplin's assumption that the philosopher and novelist Umberto Eco was similarly involved is somewhat surprising in light of his academic stature as a postmodern sceptic; a position reflected in his 1988 novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, which is a withering satire on secret societies and conspiracy theories. Although Chaplin questions her guide about the extent of Dalí's esoteric activities – especially wanting to know if he, too, undertook the pilgrimage to Mt Canigou – a definitive answer is not forthcoming. Chaplin thereby validates *The Railway Station at Perpignan* as a genuinely visionary work, and adds some provocative new shadings to Dalí's complex mystique. At the very least, art historians are provided with a novel framework for considering the meanings of Dalí's œuvre post-1965.

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Patrice Chaplin, *City of Secrets*, Quest Books, Wheaton, IL, 2007.

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## Haunted by televisual memories

The TV we grew up with has scarred us for life, says **Andy Paciorek**, examining two explorations of the macabre, spooky, edgy and dark dramas that made Mrs Whitehouse froth at the mouth

### Scarred For Life

**Volume 2 – Television in the 80s**

Stephen Brotherton & Dave Lawrence

www.ulu.com 2020 (and see Facebook group)

Pb, 530pp, £19.99 (No ISBN)

### Looking For A New England

**Action, Time, Vision Music, Film & TV 1975-1986**

Simon Matthews

Ocastic Books 2021

Pb, 256pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780857304117

Brotherton and Lawrence's *Scarred For Life* books and Simon Matthews' *Looking For a New England* cover the same period of television and cinematic history in Britain; they come at it from slightly different angles, but both are very aware of the culturally powerful and distinctive time of the 1970s and 80s.

When I first heard about the *Scarred For Life* project, a voyage of discovery into just what haunted the formative years of Generation X, my reaction was "Oh bugger!" as I had been considering creating a similar work. However, upon seeing their first book I was pleased that they had done it rather than me as their enthusiastic expertise for the subject is enlightening and infectious.

While Volume 1 covered the whole gamut of macabre and frightening stuff that beset 1970s children, from spooky-themed ice lollies to folk horror TV shows to bizarre board games, Volume 2 has a narrower focus, concentrating on weird 1980s

British TV.

They're not caught short for material there by any means. They kick off proceedings with *Noah's Castle*, a tea-time drama for kids about British families hoarding food in a time of economic desperation. With reference to crime, violence, a precarious situation for family pets and the implication of teenage girls selling their bodies for food, this grim scenario is haunting in these times of Brexit and Covid. Bizarrely, it was originally broadcast directly after *The Sooty Show*! From dog-puppet Sweep's squeaky mischief to economic dystopia in the space of an advert break.

Things don't really get any lighter on our stroll down televisual memory lane, as those of us of a certain age are reminded of our childhood traumas of viewing *Jigsaw's Noseybonk* or *Salem's Lot* (I shared a bedroom with my elder brother as a kid and during the night he would make scratching noises, claiming that Danny Glick was at the window!) or being subjected to PIFs (Public Information or rather Panic Inducing Films) telling us that if rabies did not get us it could be cigarette-induced lung cancer, AIDS or heroin (Just Say No, Zammo!).

*Scarred For Life* does not need to be read cover to cover but can be dipped into randomly. I first sought out the things that personally resonated most with me – John Wyndham (the adaptations of *The Day of the Triffids* and *Chocky*), *Tales of the Unexpected* (*The Fly Paper* episode, which freaked me

*From dog-puppet Sweep's squeaky mischief to economic dystopia in the space of an advert break*

out the most, seemingly being one that many remember with a shudder), the birth of Channel 4 (its offbeat edgy early days being very vivid in my memories), ghostly dramas and odd TV plays. Strange figures on the edge of our memories return to haunt us such as the Weetabix skinheads, *Murun Buchstan-sangur* and the Chocadooby Kinder egg man. But there are so many more engrossing rabbit holes to fall down within this book – and there are more to come. In Volume

3, we are promised a closer look at the nuclear war paranoia of the 1980s and more fortean fare such as *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World* and *The Unexplained* magazine.

Whereas *Scarred For Life* may be seen as exploring the effect that certain films and TV shows have had upon viewers, Simon Matthews' *Looking For a New England* looks at how the political-social culture and music of the era affected film – which often means how punk rock stamped its DM boot print on media output.

*Looking for a New England* does mention *Fortean Times* in passing, but its attention to fortean subject matter is peripheral and mostly in relation to

edgeland figures such as Ken Campbell, Derek Jarman, Genesis P Orridge, John Michell, Nigel Kneale, Mark E Smith and a whole chapter on David Bowie.

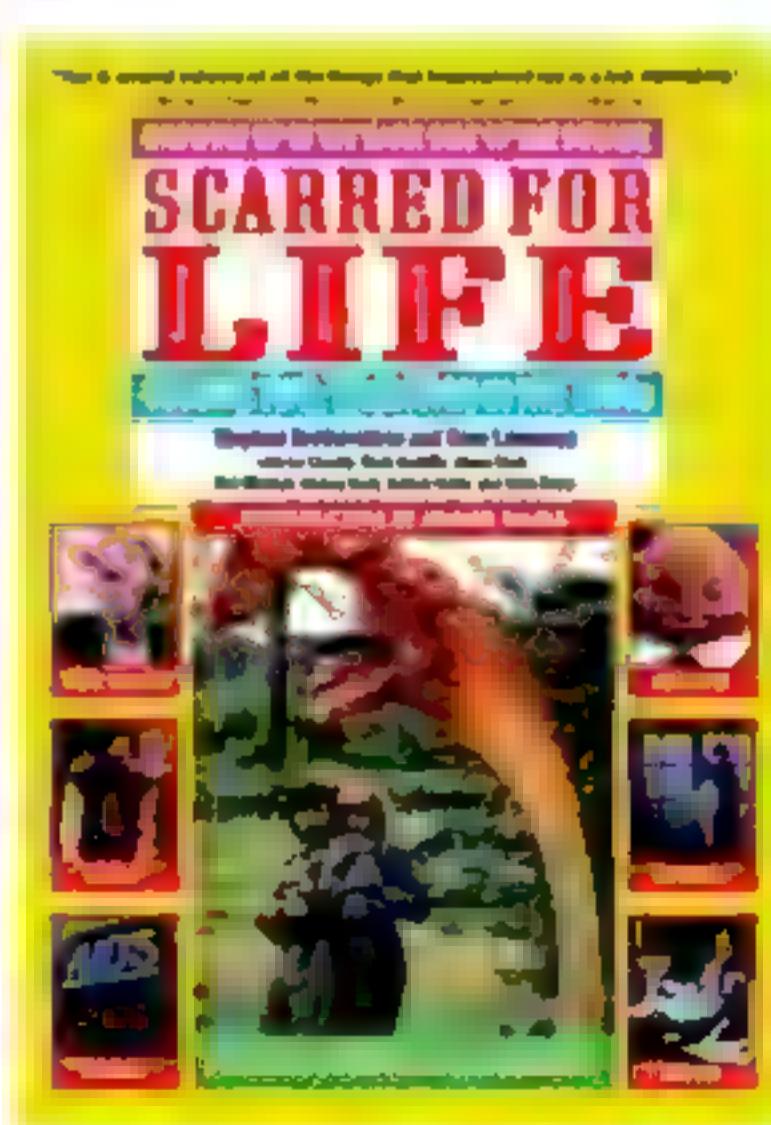
Like *Scarred for Life*, *Looking for a New England* also draws attention to Dennis Potter's *Brimstone and Treacle* (both the film and the earlier television play). Potter sometimes seems rather forgotten in the annals of nostalgic televisual revisitation, but this tale of the Devil visiting suburbia and "babysitting" a disabled catatonic woman is surely

one of British TV's most powerfully disturbing moments. Unsurprisingly, the permanently disgusted Clean Up TV campaigner of yesteryear, Mary Whitehouse, can be found wandering through both books like a froth-mouthed rabid beast.

*Looking for a New England* has a chapter dedicated to Dystopia, covering a host of dark dramas such as the Sheffield-based nuclear devastation TV film, *Threads*, the mini-series *Edge of Darkness* and *The Quatermass Conclusion*, but does not delve into horror particularly.

Matthews clearly knows his stuff, which sometimes feels like a machine-gun barrage of names and dates, but when the pace slows and he focuses on specific films, it is informative and engaging. The book might have benefited from more pages and film lists covering specific themes at the end of each chapter.

*Scarred For Life* vol 2 ★★★★  
*Looking For A New England* ★★★



## Scientific bully boys

**Gordon Rutter** sees how free speech is being stifled in the name of science

### Psi Wars

**TED, Wikipedia and the Battle for the Internet**

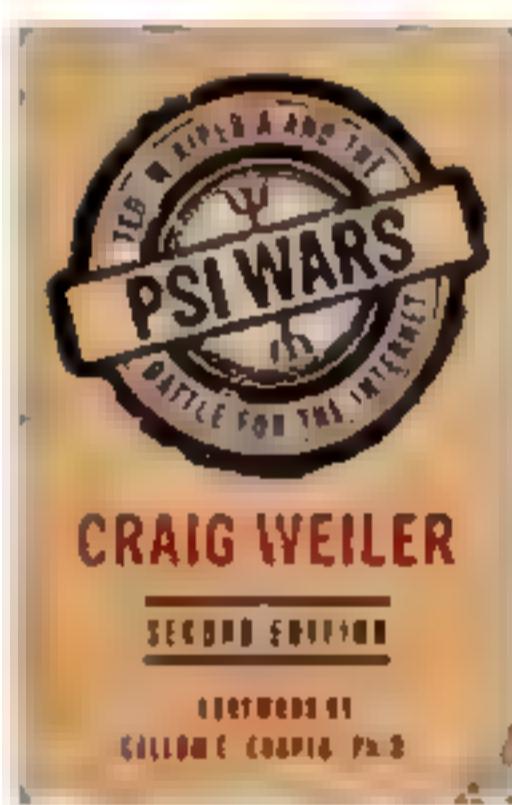
Craig Weiler

White Crow Books 2020 (2nd edn)  
Pb, 270pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781786771179

In early 2013, TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) took down a couple of videos from their website. The TED website hosts a series of videos under the slogan "Ideas Worth Spreading". Their self-stated mission is to be "a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world. We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world. On TED.com, we're building a clearinghouse of free knowledge from the world's most inspired thinkers – and a community of curious souls to engage with ideas and each other, both online and at TED and TEDx events around the world, all year long." So what were the videos that were taken down, and why do we have a book about it?

One of the videos was Rupert Sheldrake talking on "The Science Delusion" and the other was Graham Hancock on "The War on Consciousness". Both videos are still on the TED website but you have to know where to look (the blog section "the debate about..."); they are not accessible as part of the normal talk search. The reason these talks were removed? TED judged them to be not scientific.

As you can imagine, this sparked a flurry of online debate, one that the author, Craig Weiler, was heavily involved in. This updated version of his 2013 self-published book follows the story and looks at the wider



implications. It's a story of people with entrenched ideas and how Weiler feels science is being misused to actively block the discussion of conflicting ones.

Weiler blogged about the TED controversy at the time and many of the blog posts are repeated here and expanded upon. It's true to say that he doesn't like the organised 'skepticism' he sees unfold before him: "These ideologue skeptics have a flawed ability to think clearly. As a group they lack empathy and an internal ability to conceptualise the various repercussions of behaving badly." He sees this coming out in the attitude of

the TED organisers as well as on Wikipedia with the so-called Guerilla Skeptics movement – a group who constantly edit any and all entries that don't fit their view of science.

The story goes on to include a TEDx meeting which is not organised by TED but affiliated to them, and it shows how views and attitudes towards Sheldrake and Hancock nearly derailed a conference a couple of weeks before it happened, a conference that TED had been supportive and aware of for many months in advance. The last minute loss of support and cancellation could have cost the organisers many thousands of dollars.

This is a compelling story of how a small number of people are trying to stifle free speech and discussion because they don't feel the topics are worthy: a nasty underside and ultimately the sort of thing that can lead to a lack of scientific advancement. *Psi Wars* is full of discussion of closed-mindedness at its worst – something everyone should be worried about.

★★★★★

### Julius Evola

**The Philosopher and Magician in War: 1943-1945**

Gianfranco De Tums, tr Eric Dennis Antonius Galati

Inner Traditions 2020

Hb, 280pp, £25, ISBN 9781620558065

The monocle-wearing, fastidious and intemperately politically incorrect Baron Julius Evola was an Italian esoteric scholar of the 20th century with a taste for authoritarian social structures and a profound dislike of the modern world. In his early career Evola wore a number of hats – Futurist, Dadaist, metaphysician. But it wasn't until the rise of Mussolini's fascism that he saw an opportunity to pursue what he believed was the only means by which our wretched age could achieve some salvation. This was the establishment of a monarchical society modelled on the ancient notion of a caste system and informed with the guiding principles of Traditionalism: a kind of "fundamentalist esotericism," bequeathed to Evola – and the rest of us – through the work of the French savant and Islamic convert René Guénon.

Traditionalism holds that at the dawn of time, mankind was given a divine revelation about the cosmos and our place in it. Unfortunately, things swiftly went downhill after this, and although all the major religions of the world retain, in their inner (esoteric) centres, some vestige of this primordial revelation, it has generally been lost. What remains is our by now post-everything world in which all awareness of a spiritual authority, by which human beings should order their lives, has dissipated. Instead we have materialism, consumerism, democracy, socialism, egalitarianism: a generic levelling of human life to the lowest, i.e. the most "common", denominator.

It's this sort of thing that Evola doesn't like, and in Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's National Socialism he saw a chance to offer an heroic resistance to the social and political rot overtaking Europe. Although generally repellent, Evola's criticism of modernity has at times an astringency that can be salutary.



This book covers the years between Mussolini's downfall and the brief reign of the Salò Republic, and the last days of the 1,000-year Reich. It provides detailed information about Evola's activities during this time, doing his best to fight the good fight for world fascism.

It is written for the Evola scholar, or I might say anorak, as the type of information made available for the first time – as we are repeatedly told – will not seem revelatory for the average reader. But then, by definition, the average reader is not Evola's nor his epigone's target.

We are made privy to the circumstances surrounding Evola's presence at Hitler's Rastenburg safe house when Mussolini arrived, courtesy of SS superman Otto Skorzeny's daring rescue of Il Duce from the Gran Sasso. We are with Evola in hospital when he awakens from the Allied bomb blast that paralysed him from the waist down for life. We are with him as he scours secret files, searching for restricted information about the influence of Freemasonry on WWII.

This last bit is, for the non-political esoteric reader, the most interesting part of the book, although the claim that Evola was "the greatest scholar of Freemasonry" requires some salt. As does belief in the efficacy of the operations Evola is supposed to have carried out in order to restore the "original spiritual significance" of the masonic rituals the Nazis had collected and which had apparently evaporated at the hands of Freemasonry itself.

The book is marred by the author's apparent need to explain at every opportunity that Evola – hagiographically referred to as "the philosopher" throughout – was not really a fascist. A kind of cottage industry has grown up around Evolaistas about this. If there is so much smoke, one can't help but suspect a fire. Yes, he never joined the party and he disagreed with Mussolini. But he criticised Il Duce for not being fascist enough, which tells us a lot.

If you are interested in the many hairs split about this and other elements in Evola's questionable career, or are a student of Italian far-right politics in the mid-20th century, this book is for you.

Gary Lachman

★★★



## New Testament Apocrypha

More Noncanonical Scriptures

Volume 2

ed Tony Burke

Ferdmans 2020

Hb, 655pp, £60.99, ISBN 9780802872906

Most people think of the Apocrypha as the handful of books that are in Catholic Bibles but not Protestant Bibles: Judith, Tobit, the Wisdom of Solomon and others. Since *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and then *The Da Vinci Code*, many have become aware of another group of apocryphal books, often called gnostic gospels. Large collections of texts from the century or so before and after the time of Jesus were found in the last century, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library.



But there are many more. This is the second collection of obscure Christian texts edited by Tony Burke; some are early, some as late as the 12th century, most of them are rare and many of them never before available in English translation. It's a scholarly book, with detailed introductions and notes to each of the translated texts. Some are complete "books"; others are episodes slipped into some versions of longer texts.

One is an account of a young lad, Dimas, who lets Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus escape Herod's search. His father disowns him, and he embarks on a life of banditry, ending up on a cross next to Jesus; he confesses to him and they go into glory together.

Another is the delightfully-titled but gruesome "Acts of Thomas and his Wonderworking Skin". The apostle Thomas is sold by a post-Resurrection Jesus to a new master in India. While the master is away Thomas converts his wife who, when the master returns, won't have sex with him on Sunday. Enraged, the master has Thomas flayed. The wife hurls herself off the roof of the house and dies; Thomas takes his flayed skin and lays it over her, and she comes back from the dead – at which point the master converts

as well. After similar adventures Jesus reappears, glues Thomas's flayed skin back on his body, and they go off on a cloud.

Then there's the complex "Legend of the Holy Rood Tree", in which twigs from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden end up becoming the cross that Jesus is crucified on.

There's a "Life of Mary Magdalene" that has her going to Marseille. There are two versions of a "Life of Judas" which have him, Oedipus-like, killing his father and marrying his mother before following and then betraying Jesus. There are gospels, acts, apocalypses and more – 29 texts in all, a fascinating insight into how Christians have expanded and embroidered their mythology over the centuries.

Jay Vickers  
★★★★

## Spirits, Gods and Magic

An Introduction to the Anthropology of the Supernatural

Jack Hunter

August Night Press/White Crow Books 2020 (2nd edn)  
Pb, 144pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781786771315

All human life is here, it seems: traditional tribal beliefs, the "world religions" with their gods, devils and djinn, soul systems of ancient Egypt and China, nature spirits, fairies, witches, poltergeists, the paranormal and the psychedelic; Hunter's breadth of coverage is breathtaking.

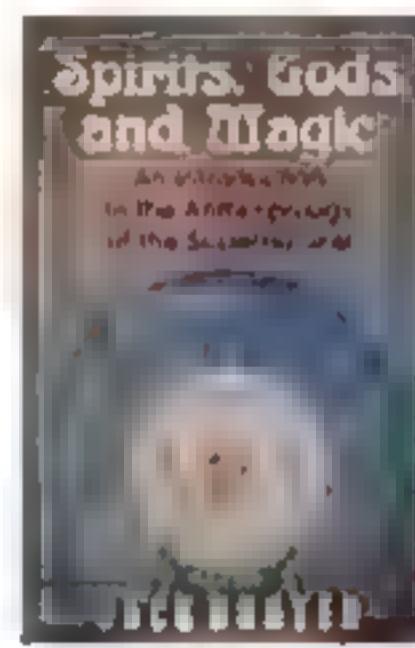
This book does just what its subtitle says. It's well-organised conceptually, a typical chapter beginning with a topic definition and then running through sets of examples from the archaeological, historical and anthropological records, to build up a global picture. Depth is not in this design; instead, we are given an open-minded overview. Its uniqueness is not any one new insight – the ideas covered are many and various – but it is the scope which is unusual. Hunter seems to have a mercurial knack for conveying ideas from different spheres and disciplines and synthesising data from diverse paradigms. Whether this endeav-

our is valid or correct remains a moot point, but perhaps "right" and "wrong" are not quite what we should be seeking; Hunter seems concerned more with possibility and potential. It's not that he wants us to believe things, but he does not want us to dismiss or disbelieve them either. Rather than telling us what to think, his main concern is that we do think. Moreover, we should experience.

Given this focus on "experience", a little more basic explanation of the anthropological and sociological technique of ethnography, not widely used beyond the social sciences, might have been helpful. (Ethnography means living alongside real people in real-life day-to-day settings, rather than questionnaires or laboratory work.) However, ethnographic sensitivity to social drama (character, set and setting) still leaves the major question: what is real human experience and how is it, sometimes, supernatural? Hunter suggests approaches, not answers... attention to complexity and holism, to subtlety and synergy.

While this is not a difficult text to read in that it is lucidly written, it is not for those seeking simplicity; it is highly recommended for anyone requiring a clear outline of approaches to intriguing and inordinate questions. We may not short-term gain any comforting feelings of certainty from reading such an author, but we might achieve an attentiveness to aspects of reality not dreamt of in some philosophies.

William Redwood  
★★★★★



## Entangled Life

How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures

Merlin Sheldrake

Bodley Head 2020  
Hb, 368pp, £20, ISBN 9781847925190

Merlin Sheldrake is a young writer, musician and scientist, and a passionate advocate for the transformative power of fungi. *Entangled Life* is one part popular science book, and another part his fungal manifesto, promoting a mycelial world view of fluid and evolving networks, where discrete and autonomous individuals don't strictly exist.

We join him as he scours the world for rare moulds, brews arcane mediæval beverages and even eats a copy of his own book infected with mushrooms. Supporting characters, contemporary and historical, include the psychedelic mystic Terence McKenna and the English mycologist Beatrix Potter – better known for her children's stories.

But the fungi themselves are always the star of the show – curing disease, warping our perceptions, operating as massive computer brains hidden deep in the soil beneath us (the "Wood Wide Web") or surviving the extremes of space above.

Fungi, it seems, have played an integral part in human history, culture and maybe our very evolution. As Sheldrake argues, their unique capabilities may yet save us from ecological catastrophe.

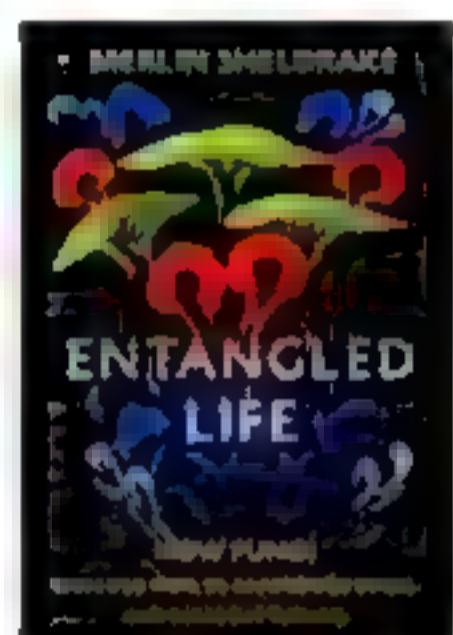
The book is littered with incidental illustrations in mushroom ink. Sheldrake's light and accessible prose is rigorously referenced throughout. Speculation is entertained, but carefully signposted and weighed against the evidence.

Sheldrake's father Rupert, familiar to many forteans for his controversial research into psychic animals and mysterious fields, warrants only the briefest of mentions. Merlin does not carry his torch here. This is foremost a book for a mainstream science audience. Indeed, some forteans may wish to skip the slower chapters on carbon transfer and root development.

Once his stall is set out, there is a rather high degree of repetition, and some content may be overly familiar. The ant-infesting "zombie fungus" cordyceps, while remarkable, is a regular villain of nature documentaries and the inspiration for both *The Girl With All the Gifts* and *The Last of Us*.

Yet Sheldrake's fungal perspective, of the interconnected "labyrinthine rotscape", remains both fascinating and fundamentally fortean. We must always, Sheldrake implores us, "resist the temptation to remedy uncertainty with certainty". Future works will likely bear more (fungal) fruit.

Ryan Shirlow  
★★★



# Urban fragments

Edgeland wanderers and psychogeographers will find a wealth of shabby but otherworldly relics of abandonment

## Unofficial Britain

**Journeys through Unexpected Places**

Gareth E Rees

Elliott & Thompson 2020

In the late 1960s my grandmother drove me around south London, saying: "Take a good look – they want to destroy it all!"

In *Unofficial Britain*, Gareth E Rees relates how capitalism steals our past and abandons us among the relics of truncated utopian visions: "A tower block can become eerie in the absence of that life it once promised." Inhabitants of a visionary housing estate "were promised an entirely new way of life", but the community centre and pub failed to materialise, the place disintegrated, and they were "left to exist in a cancelled idea". Council estates are haunted by the usual white ladies, poltergeists and faceless monks: the Grimsby Ghosthunters investigate sightings.

"It makes you wonder how many times people meet ghosts and don't even realise it," says one.

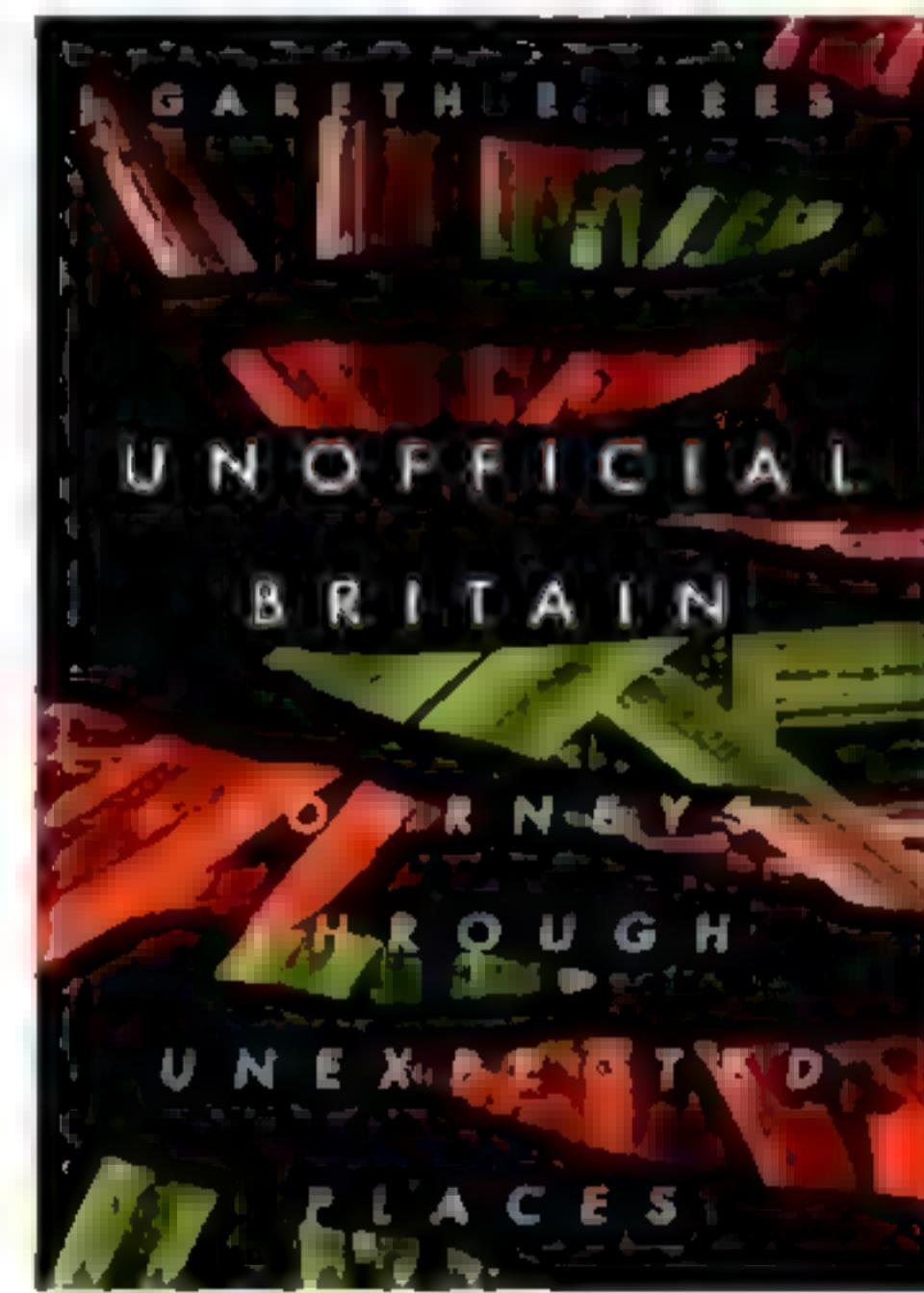
Hundreds of houses were flattened to make room for a motorway in Cardiff. Those doomed to exist right next to it received no compensation – they were "a necessary sacrifice to the gods of economic progress". They were even expected to be consoled by the idea that the flyover would become one of the "sights of Wales". (Unlike those living by London's Westway, whose banner "GET US OUT OF THIS HELL" was eventually acted on.)

Rees set up the website Unofficial Britain in 2014 ([unofficialbritain.com](http://unofficialbritain.com), with links to outfits such as Liminal Whitby and the Pylon Appreciation Society). He drives off almost at random in search of the Stonehenges of the modern

world: pylons, roundabouts, flyovers, motorways, new towns, multi-storey carparks, industrial estates, hospitals, factories and his home town. He doesn't seek enlightenment or, God forbid, "closure" – he's looking for the human factor.

A displaced Pole may have succeeded in living on a roundabout for years, but in Morecambe's Central Retail Park they "are populated by sculptures of seabirds, celebrating its coastal heritage".

The factory chimney that dominated Rees's childhood landscape fell into disuse, and suggestions for turning it into an artwork included the addition of a giant hare. He found no such "iconic" mammal when he visited



but instead "a gated trading estate with motor-repair centres, tool companies, medical-supply businesses and dog-groomers".

Under the Eastville Flyover at Junction 2 of the M32, the concrete has been painted with fish and dragonflies. A man with dreadlocks has made a home in a tent, and another human lies bundled in a sleeping bag at the mouth of a pee-stained underpass. Down here among a forest of concrete pillars, a river still flows.

"Can you help me?" asks a woman clutching a Tesco's bag. She explains she left her mother shopping but now can't find her way back. She borrows Rees's phone to call mother (no reply),

but declines to return to the supermarket and wait there. He regretfully leaves her in the underworld.

"Lingering fragments" of 1960s docklands survive among main roads, scrapyards and Bow Creek, with its occasional sightings of out-of-place bears and an alleged crocodile.

In Canning Town the niche music venues are shutting and co-working spaces taking over, but it's just another phase: "Small creative businesses and artists are only the outriders of the rapacious property development boom in London."

The Bruce Report of 1945, which recommended the demolition of central Glasgow, "met with fierce opposition but was nonetheless approved by the Glasgow Corporation in 1947". Two years later the plan was cancelled as too expensive, but work was started on the motorway "box" before it was abandoned in the 70s. What remains is plagued, of course, by phantom hitchhikers and Roman armies.

While criss-crossing Britain, Rees stops off at Hilton Park's space-age service station of 1967, now a "shabby relic". But all motorway service stations are somewhat "other-worldly": are they a foretaste of the afterlife, where we'll be trapped for eternity among "wet floor" cones and unused massage chairs?

Is there no escape? You can always get back in your car and drive off along the tarmac, where everyone is trying to overtake, or tailgating those following the legal speed limit: "It's as if the world beyond the crash barriers was an illusion and the only reality was the road."

Written without frills but evoking the most eerie of locations, this book will appeal to ley hunters, psychic questers, urban explorers, psychogeographers and all edgeland wanderers.

Lucy R Fisher

★★★★★

## Roswell: The Ultimate Cold Case

**Eyewitness Testimony and Evidence of Contact and the Cover-Up**

Thomas J Carey & Donald R Schmitt

New Page Books 2020

Pb, 276pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781632651709

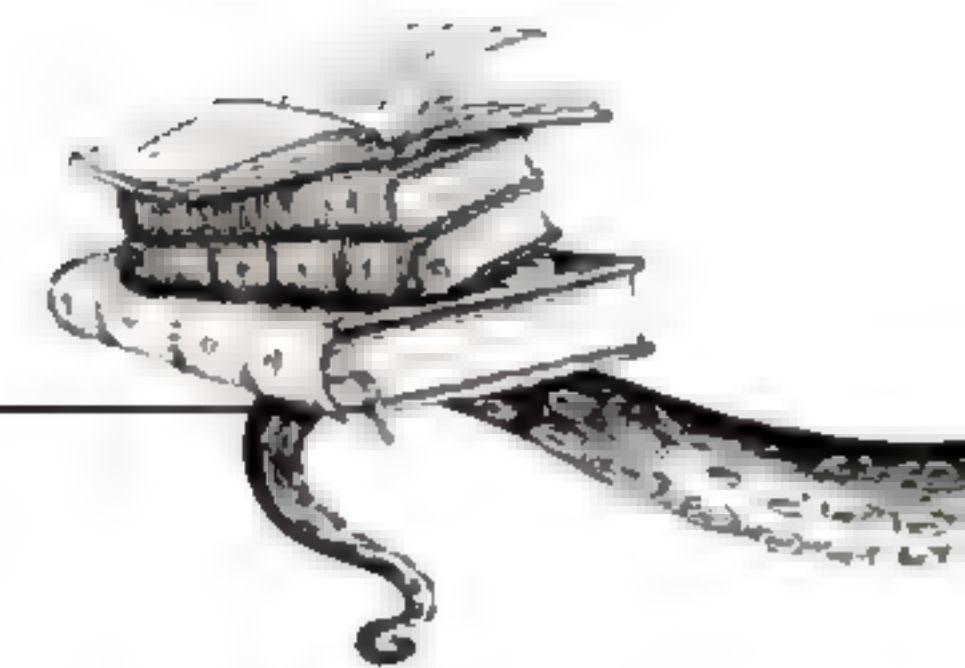
Seventy-three years after the alleged UFO crash in the desert outside Roswell, New Mexico, it is difficult to believe that anything less than an official acknowledgment by the US government and/or the release of incontrovertible evidence would provide researchers with a publication-worthy development, especially in light of the already copious literature on the subject.

Unhappily, this has not prevented Thomas Carey and Donald Schmitt

from going over the same old ground yet again. Their gimmick is the presentation of the accumulated research and resultant speculation as evidence in an imaginary trial, and that "beyond a reasonable doubt" an alien spacecraft crashed in the New Mexico desert in 1947. This loosely legal apparatus apparently attempts to approximate Vincent Bugliosi's *Reclaiming History*, which, in contrast to Carey and Schmitt's, masterfully dispenses with the vast web of conspiracy and distortions of fact that surround the assassination of President Kennedy. Also in contrast, Bugliosi is a skilled lawyer, and disciplined enough to maintain his premise; Carey and Schmitt, perhaps aware of their lack of expertise, quickly abandon their weakly argued "legal" framework. Indeed, they lose steam roughly midway through, in large part due to a frustrating lack of worthwhile new material. They grasp at straws, padding their manuscript with bizarre chapters on persons, no matter how superficially affiliated, who have been "touched by Roswell" – such as actors who have portrayed characters in on-screen adaptations – as well as a smattering of obligatory deathbed confessions and new "witnesses".

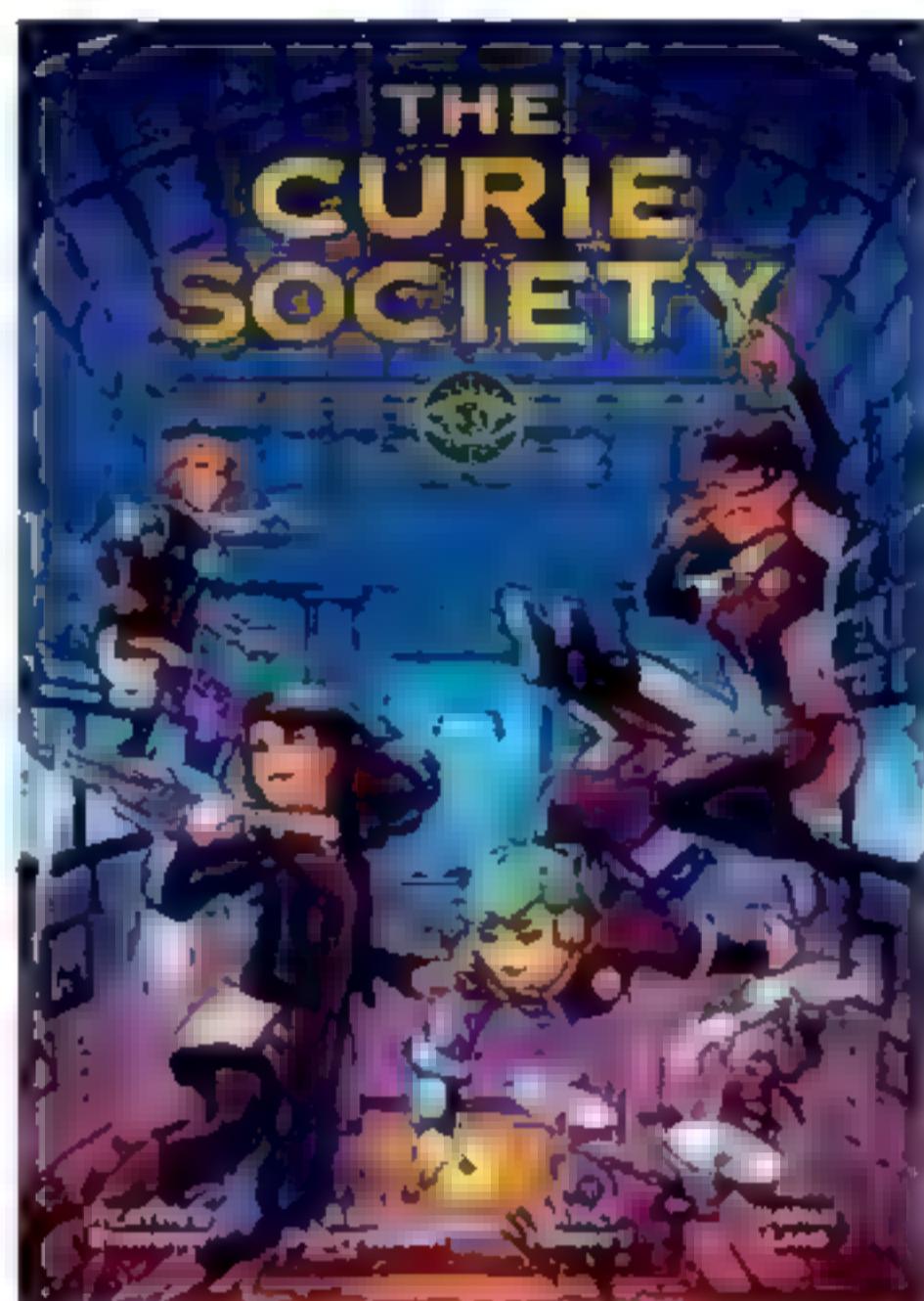
This is a frustrating and altogether unnecessary book. Eric Hoffmann

★



# COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

STEVE TOASE PRESENTS HIS LATEST PICKS FROM THE WORLD OF SEQUENTIAL ART



## The Curie Society

Heather Einhorn, Adam Staffaroni, Janet Harvey, Sonia Liao  
MIT Press, 2021

PB, pp168, £13.99, ISBN 9780262539944

Three young students arrive at university and find themselves recruited into a secret society. This isn't unusual as a storyline. What makes *The Curie Society* different is that it places the role of women in science at the heart of its storytelling. All three of the main characters are well written and distinctive, with clear strengths and identities. While the science is a main focus of the book, the way it is incorporated helps carry the story along rather than slow it down. Throughout, *The Curie Society* emphasises the role of women in a huge range of stem subjects, introducing cutting edge science, and delivering the whole package in an entertaining way. This is strong storytelling first and foremost, tough, with a golden thread of science running through it. This is enhanced by the final section of the book with short bios of leading women scientists and capsule descriptions of the concepts introduced throughout. Highly recommended.

## Vicious Creatures

Sarah Gordon  
[www.gumroad.com/sarahgordon](http://www.gumroad.com/sarahgordon)  
Pb, pp250, £16 / Digital, pp250, £10

A book drawn with ink from a burnt wicker owl? How could we resist?

*Vicious Creatures* is a gorgeous piece of art. From cover

to cover, Sarah Gordon's collection is full of strikingly visceral images, many with the quality of woodcuts (especially the title pages and the beautiful fire-and-hare themed endpiece). This is a comic, not an art book, though; so is the storytelling strong enough to support the artwork? I'm very happy to say that it is. Each of the tales is distinctive, fresh and yet has a classic feel. Horror stories unfold in London streets and on Salisbury Plain; there are hares and drummers, witches and owls.

Sarah Gordon has a real talent for using the page to make the artwork dynamic. Blank pages are used to pause the story, like a rest between movements in a symphony, and splash pages are used to reach a psychedelic cacophony. In some ways her work reminds me of Emily Carroll. Their styles are different, but they both harness the gothic to tell new stories. My personal favourites here are probably 'Sweetness' and 'The Salisbury Owl', but it really is hard to narrow it down to just two. A beautiful book that you really need in your collection.

## Thistlebone

TC Eglington, Simon Davis  
Rebellion Publishing, 2021

Hb, pp64, £12.99, ISBN 9781781087787

2000AD is best known for its sci-fi comics, but over the years it has featured several horror and related stories. *Thistlebone* is an excellent example. Twenty years after dramatically escaping a cult led by Jasper Hillman, Avril returns to the village of Harrowvale with writer Seema, and an incredibly unsettling tale ensues. The dialogue feels real and grounded, the storyline is well paced, and this exploration of people damaged by belief has a very effective and powerful conclusion.

The artwork by Simon Davis is stunning. Characters are portrayed with a stark realism that is subverted by the masterful colouring, flecks of white across the dark blue of a character's hair becoming constellations. The woods and the people lost

within them are rendered otherworldly, the natural world, stark and brutal. This is a comic that is red in tooth, claw and blade, and all the better for it.

## The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

INJ Culbard  
Self Made Hero, 2021

Pb, pp120-144, £9.99, ISBN 9781910593950

## The Shadow Out of Time

INJ Culbard  
Self Made Hero, 2021

Pb, pp120-144, £9.99, ISBN 9781910593966

## The King in Yellow

INJ Culbard  
Self Made Hero, 2021

Pb, pp144, £9.99, ISBN 9781910593943

## The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath

INJ Culbard  
Self Made Hero, 2021

Pb, pp144, £9.99, ISBN 9781910593974

The four books in Self Made Hero's new pocket sized 'Weird Fiction Library' are a perfect introduction to the genre. Culbard is very experienced at adapting fiction to the comic book form, and his art is perfect for the surreal and often unsettling subject matter here.

To tackle Lovecraft's work requires the ability to create a sense of scale on the page, and Culbard does this with great skill. Towers of dream cities rise from empty plains, and disembodied characters float down vast deserted halls. At one point in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, Randolph Carter is reduced to little more than a vague shape as he is carried through the air, showing his insignificance to the landscape that surrounds him.

The colouring throughout reminds me of comics such as *Tintin*. This might sound odd, but works perfectly at unfurling the creeping terror of cosmic horror – look for example at the contrast between twilight skies and the yellow-green in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.

With his talent for rendering facial expressions, Culbard is

equally successful in bringing to life the often flawed characters in these four stories. The page in *Unknown Kadath* intercutting the phases of the Moon with Carter's face is definitely one of my favourites, marking both the passage of time and Carter's changing mental state.

While all four books are excellent, I'd especially like to highlight *The King in Yellow*. Robert W Chambers's classic has received a bit more attention recently due to *True Detective*, but it's still not as widely known as Lovecraft's work, and really should be. It is very odd, even by the standards of weird fiction.

I would highly recommend these four comics as an entry point to weird fiction and cosmic horror. If you want something very different start with *The King in Yellow*, and pick up *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* first if you like cats.

## Beatnik Buenos Aires

Diego Arandojo, Facundo Percio  
Fantagraphics, 2021  
Pb, 110pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781683964032

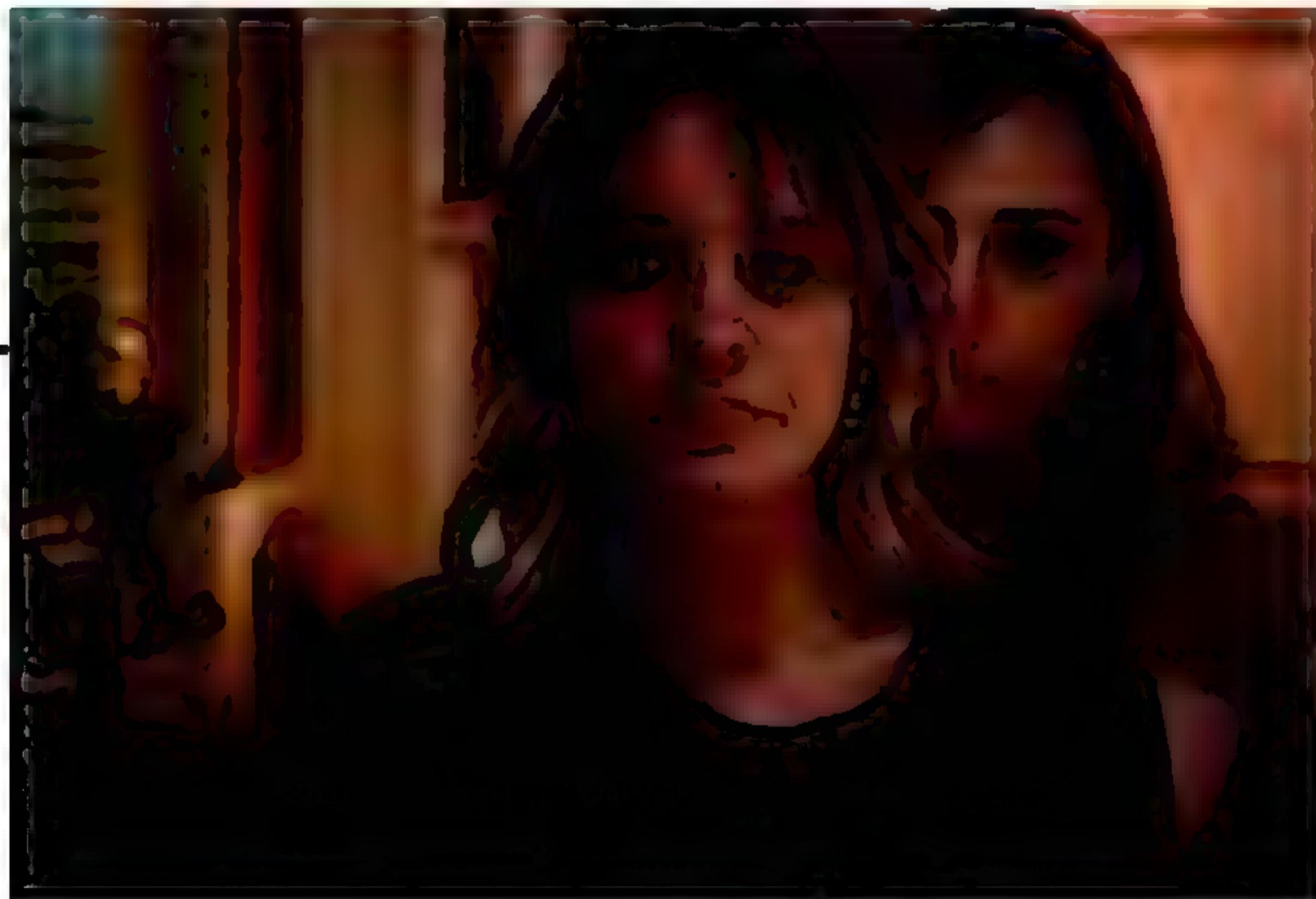
There's a special joy in reading a comic that opens up a previously unknown world to the reader: I knew nothing about the Beatnik scene in Argentina until reading this comic, and it is filled with characters, cults and personalities as complex and creative as the French Surrealists or the German Expressionists.

Here, Arandojo and Percio introduce Ithacar Jali (volunteer firefighter, artist, and founder of Church of the Final Sun), Jaroslav Kosak (metaphysical photographer), Goldie (forger and trendsetter), and many others. The world of cafés, backstreet theatres, and midnight streets are as much characters as any of the artists. The monochrome, almost smeared, charcoal artwork perfectly complements the stories, reflecting the hazy mythology and inventiveness that grows up around artists. At the end of the book an appendix goes into more detail about the artists, writers, and actors. With Arandojo and Percio as guides, *Beatnik Buenos Aires* is a joy to discover.

TO SEND REVIEW COPIES, CONTACT THE EDITOR AT [DRSUTTON@FORTEANTIMES.COM](mailto:DRSUTTON@FORTEANTIMES.COM)

## Much style, some substance

This accomplished arthouse chiller puts women front and centre both behind and in front of the cameras – even if it deliberately fails the Bechdel Test – but doesn't quite convince



### The Stylist

Dir Jill Gervargizian, US 2020  
On Arrow Channel now

This is a beautiful and at times shocking arthouse horror with an atmosphere all its own – but it has a somewhat perplexing premise and story.

The central character is Claire (Najarra Townsend), a quiet and rather awkward young woman who works as a hair stylist. She is able to make pleasant conversation with her clients but otherwise seems to lead a solitary existence. She apparently has no relatives or friends and no partner; the only hint of a meaningful relationship is with a woman who works at the coffee place who has a crush on her. It's clear that Claire has little happiness in her life.

I don't want to say too much about how Claire's story progresses from here, because what she gets up to provides most of the incident in the film, and certainly the horror elements. Suffice it to say that, almost despite herself, she forms a friendship with her client Olivia (Brea Grant), a young woman soon to be married. Claire

*It's refreshing to watch a film with virtually no male speaking parts*

reluctantly becomes involved in the preparations for the wedding and, as she gets closer to Olivia, comes to crave the life her new friend has.

It's refreshing to watch a film which has virtually no male speaking parts worthy of mention. This is such a rarity in cinema that when an example does come along it shines out like a beacon. The opposite scenario is obviously much more common, particularly – and understandably – in war films. One of my favourite movies of all time is *The Great Escape*, and I think I'm right in saying that it doesn't have *any* female speaking parts; indeed, there aren't any women credited in the cast at all.

While it's true that much of the talk is *about* men, thereby failing the superficial Bechdel Test (whether a piece of fiction features two or more women discussing something other than men), it is often about how

disposable they are. Olivia wonders about whether she really wants to marry her boyfriend, and if by doing so she's just conforming to what society expects. Claire's first client – a married woman who travels a lot for work – talks about picking up young men for casual sex when she's away from home. Claire doesn't talk about men at all.

*The Stylist* does function as a standard horror film: as in most, the victims are all women; the murder scenes are almost

fetishised; there are moments of fake jeopardy; and there really is something nasty in the basement. Despite that, it somehow doesn't feel like a horror film, perhaps because it takes place in hair salons, nightclubs, coffee shops, and nice bright homes – or maybe because everyone is nice, friendly, warm, and helpful. There are no obnoxious teens here. There aren't any clanking chains or rusty tools, and there's no terrible heavy metal or industrial music on the soundtrack.

There are problems though. First of all, it's an absurd, inexplicable premise for a story – you'll see what I mean. There is no backstory for Claire, so we never discover the basic motivation for her actions. The ease with which she goes about her business is also baffling; for a woman who looks like she couldn't fight her way out of a paper bag, Claire does seem remarkably handy. There are no police, no fear in the neighbourhood, no real acknowledgement that crimes are being committed with abandon. Maybe director Gervargizian is simply not interested in details such as this: after all, she is most concerned with depicting

a damaged psyche. But Claire's damaged psyche is apparent because of its separation from the normal world, so there has to be some effort to make that normal world as normal as possible. At times you're left scratching your head, thinking: "Why isn't anyone reacting to this?"

Nevertheless, this is a good film. Visually, it's very appealing, and great care has clearly been taken with the lighting and costumes. Najarra Townsend is outstanding as Claire; she's an unusual actress and as such has rather got bogged down in genre movies, but she's a genuine talent.

Daniel King



### Archenemy

Dir Adam Egypt Mortimer, US 2020  
On Digital Platforms and DVD

The follow-up to Adam Egypt Mortimer's well-received 2019 horror film *Daniel Isn't Real*, this is a superhero/sci-fi feature, but with a similar theme of entities crossing between two worlds. Hamster (Skylan Brooks) is a bright teenager trying to break into journalism who snags a trial at a community arts project. He's asked to write a story with some local colour to it and hears about a ragged old alcoholic hobo called Max Fist (Joe Manganiello) who wanders aimlessly around the neighbourhood telling anyone who'll listen that he's a warrior from another world stranded on Earth.

Meanwhile, Hamster's sister Indigo (a bright turn from the promising Zolee Griggs) works for the local drug baron, hoping to stash away enough money to send her brother to college. When she fails one of her errands, two hitmen are sent to find her. Max shows up and saves the two siblings in an awesome display of strength. He now believes it is his destiny to protect the two

from falling into the hands of Cleo, the mastermind behind the entire drugs network. Cleo, he believes, is his – wait for it – archenemy from his own world; it was his defeating her that saved his people but caused him to fall to Earth.

It sounds a little complicated, but it really isn't; this is essentially a simple is he/is he not tale. Is Max a deluded loser seeking a meaning to life or is he really what remains of a broken superhero? The film actually does a really good job of hiding the truth pretty much until the big finish, so it's certainly intriguing. It's also oddly endearing. The imperilled Hamster and Indigo – who are orphans – being rescued by a brave warrior is straight out of a fairy tale, and Max's story about being lost and a long way from home but finding a quest to give him purpose is similarly the stuff of legends, whether it's true or not.

You'd be wrong, though, in thinking that this is a teen fantasy film. For one thing, it is at times incredibly violent, with a number of brutal and shocking deaths. Now I know there are filmgoers who love that sort of bone-crunching action, and it can be undeniably thrilling to watch, but in *Archenemy* it doesn't quite gel with the essentially rather old-fashioned plot. Also, the drug dealer scenes are gritty, sleazy and unpleasant; as they should be, you might say, but – again – sometimes it feels like you're watching two different films simultaneously: a heart-warming story about two orphans, and an urban action movie like *The Punisher*.

That said, it is all imaginatively handled. The scenes where Max reminisces/dreams about other worlds are animated, which plays up the possibilities of him being either a comic book-style superhero or merely a fantasist. Director Mortimer also draws some strong performances from his cast: as well as the aforementioned Griggs, Joe Manganiello has rarely been better, and Glenn Howerton, an actor new to me, makes an impression as Indigo's boss.

Overall, I'm not sure this is quite as good as *Daniel Isn't Real*, but it is a solid and well-made piece of entertainment and a great way to spend an hour and a half.

Daniel King



## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.peterlaws.co.uk](http://www.peterlaws.co.uk))

### The Banishing

Dir Christopher Smith, UK 2021  
On digital platforms from 26 March

### Reunion

Dir Jake Mahaffy, New Zealand, 2020  
On digital platforms from 22 March

### Sacrifice

Dir Andy Collier, Tor Mian, UK 2020  
On digital platforms from 15 March

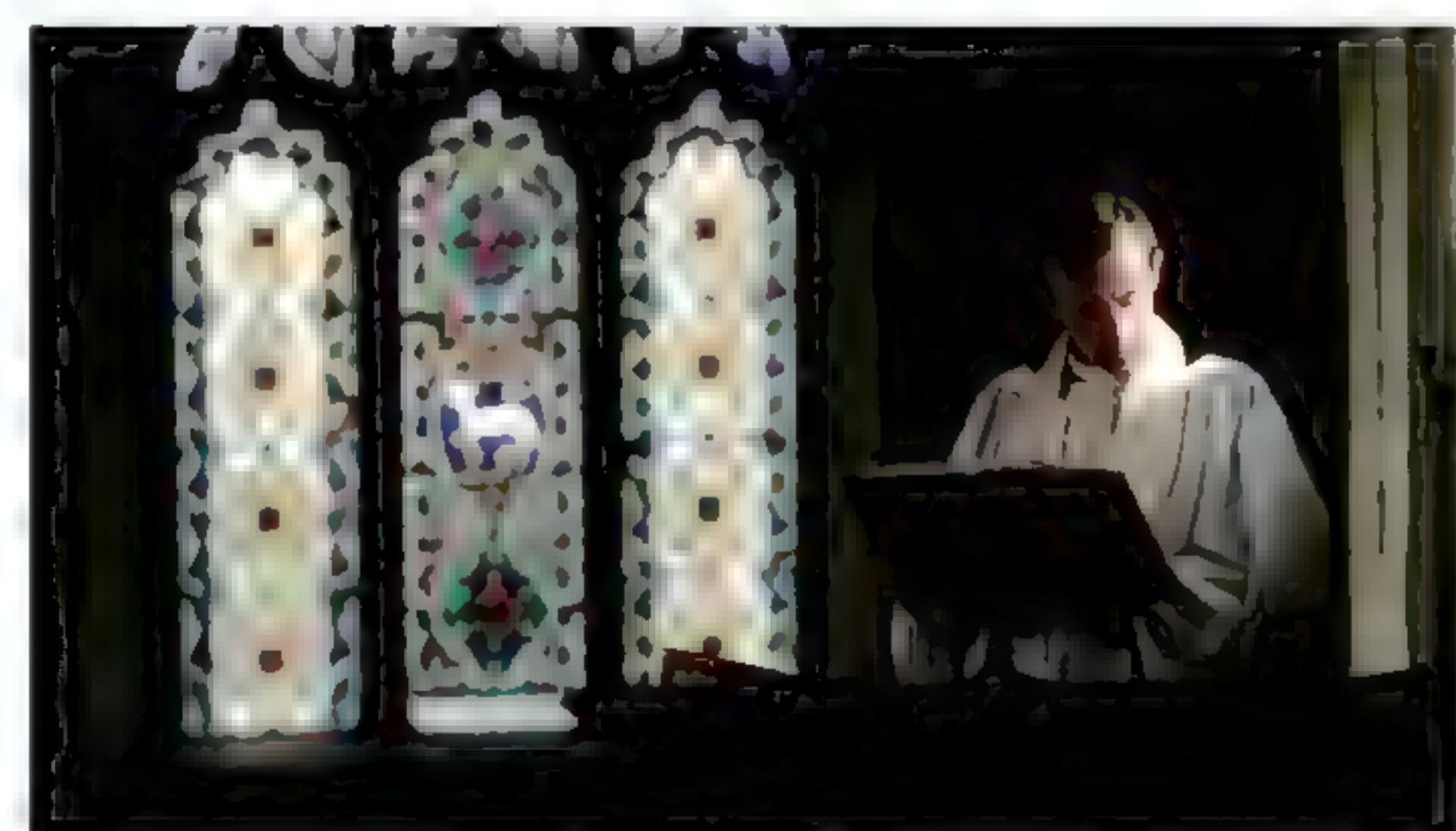
The long demolished Borley Rectory continues to haunt the screen. I know of at least three recent films based on the infamous house (Ashley Thorpe's 2017 docu-drama *Borley Rectory* being my pick). *The Banishing* takes place in 'Morley' Rectory (geddit?) and is inspired by the real-life Reverend Smith and his wife, who moved into Borley only to come across the skull of a young woman. This movie version takes the scenario and runs with it, throwing in mirror universes, sexual repression and occult Nazis for good measure. It's a handsome production, with an earnest cast. Jessica Brown Findlay (*Downtown Abbey*) plays the vicar's wife, while FT readers may especially enjoy Sam Harris's portrayal of ghost hunter Harry Price, who speaks in the clipped, sinister whisper of a villain but has a kind and misunderstood heart – and a killer tight perm. Director Christopher Smith has a slate of left-field gems to his credit and offers some striking imagery here. Creepy highlights include a trio of hooded monks gathered around a child's bed and multiple Findlays floating against a wall (inspired, I reckon, by a spooky picture from a 1970s German stage performance of *Bluebeard* that has done the rounds on the Internet). By journey's end, though, this is a surprisingly



*Mirror universes, sexual repression and occult Nazis for good measure*

conventional ghost movie, which isn't always a bad thing, just not quite what I thought Smith might do. The title is no surprise, however. Since *The Conjuring* hit so big, it seems that every haunted house film has to end in an "ing".

By comparison, *Reunion* is a more surreal and complex haunted house tale in which Ella, a teacher of occult history, reunites with her estranged (not to mention strange) mother in their



oppressive childhood home. Ella is heavily pregnant, which becomes a catalyst for extreme tension between the two. The two leads create a chilling sense of palpable mental chaos always bubbling under the service. Yet they keep hiding it with polite talk and misdirected anger: "Don't tell me to calm down! You're boiling the cauliflower!" While the supernatural features in *Reunion*, the real ghosts here are the psychological ripples from a dysfunctional, damaged family. Be warned: it's a weird, relentlessly ominous film, which might explain why some audiences have struggled to connect with it. For me, though, it was a truly haunting, sometimes distressing experience – the type I almost want to forget, but can't; which, for a horror film, is a recommendation.

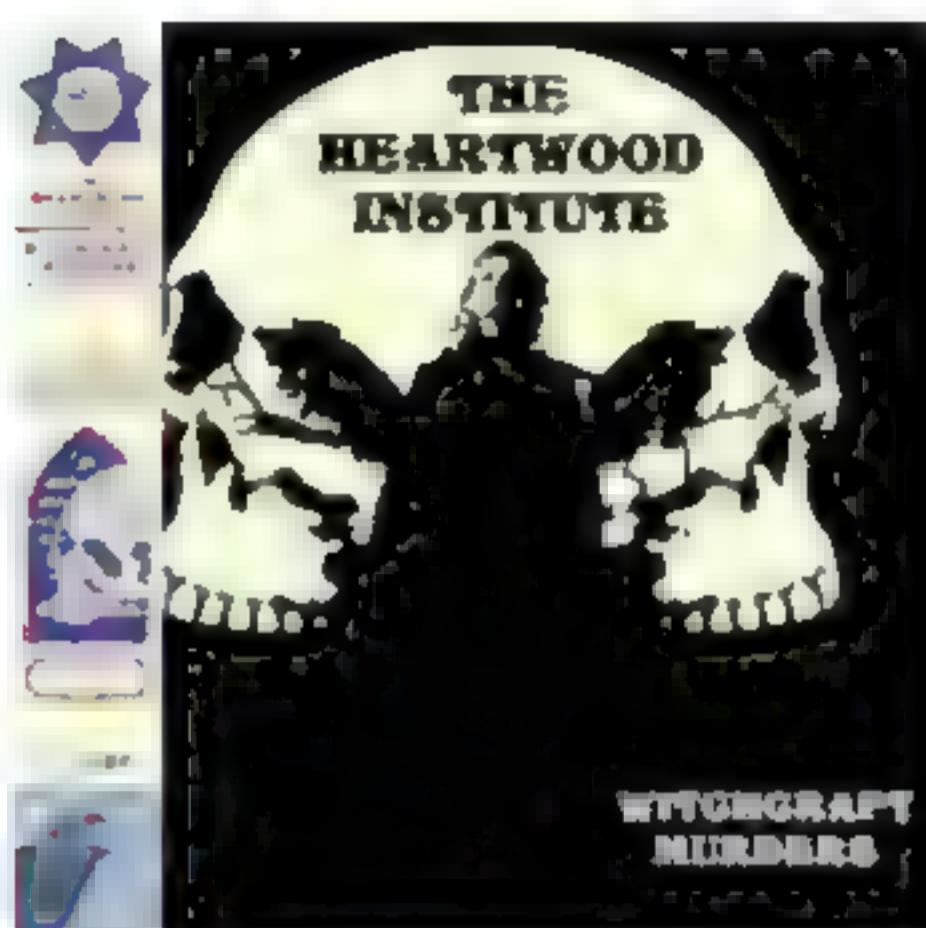
Less surreal but more fun is *Sacrifice*, in which a New York couple travel to a quirky small town in Norway to claim an inheritance... only to find the locals cheerfully donning white robes to worship a mysterious Sea God. Sure, it's schlocky at times, but you can tell the film is aiming for more. At its heart is folk-horror mythology rather than huge creature effects and jump scares. The Scandi location is strange and beguiling, as is horror icon Barbara Crampton, who anchors the action with a performance that is half-playful, half-sinister – a mood that the film itself seems to be aiming for. If *Midsommar* lite with a Lovecraftian twist sounds like your thing, give it a go.

# THE HAUNTED GENERATION

## BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...

"I remember reading about Charles Walton when I was a kid," remembers Jonathan Sharp, the genial Cumbrian behind The Heartwood Institute. "And he was referred to as The Toad Man! Apparently, one of his magical powers was the ability to hook natterjack toads up to a miniature carriage, and run them across fields to blight peoples' crops. That's the kind of thing that sticks in your mind..."

The new Heartwood Institute album *Witchcraft Murders* is a musical investigation into two of the 20th century's most notorious unsolved crimes. Charles Walton was the farm worker who, in 1945, was murdered with his own pitchfork near the sleepy Warwickshire village of Lower Quinton (see FT381: 44-51). This grisly killing has been linked with rumours of local occultism, as has the intriguing 1943 "Bella in the Wych Elm" case (FT364: 34-41), in which the remains of a still-unidentified woman were discovered inside the trunk of a Worcestershire elm tree, sparking decades of cryptic West Midlands graffiti. "Really, I think these were simply two terrible murders, but they've picked up extra trappings over the years," continues Jonathan. Rather than lingering over the gruesome details, the album explores the strange baggage of both cases with a sense of atmospheric melodicism that will delight fans of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. It's available from [libraryoftheoccult.bandcamp.com](http://libraryoftheoccult.bandcamp.com). And while you're there, check out *Death Walks On Nitrate*, a groovy 1970-style film soundtrack from label boss Tom McDowell, recording as Dream Division. There are – and I don't say this lightly – mellotrons. Jonathan has also been collaborating with Bristol's James "Hawksmoor" McKeown on a record inspired by JG Ballard's classic 1974 novel, *Concrete Island*. Their album of the same name is a monolithic



# **Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan Interim Report, March 1979**



slab of Tubeway Army-esque workouts, perfectly in keeping with the book's themes of Surrealist alienation. Find it at [spunoutofcontrol.bandcamp.com](http://spunoutofcontrol.bandcamp.com). And similarly lost in the concrete wilderness is Gordon Chapman-Fox, recording as Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan. His new record *Interim Report, 1979* mercilessly evokes the golden age of Brutalist town planning, with dystopian analogue synths conjuring images of graffiti-covered subways, desolate multi-storey car parks and crumbling branches of C&A.

"The estates of Runcorn were space-age futurist with external plumbing, rounded windows and raised walkways," says Gordon. "But as housing, they were a failure. The album

looks at this gap between vision and reality." It's available from [castlesinspace.bandcamp.com](http://castlesinspace.bandcamp.com). From the same label comes The Eccentric Research Council's *Dreamcatcher Tapes*. Adrian Flanagan and Dean Honer have set recollections of genuine dreams, recorded by the likes of Maxine Peake and Benjamin Myers, to sympathetic musical landscapes. Adrian nominates the dream of singer Evangeline Ling as his favourite. "It's amazing," he says. "She goes from being strangled by the hair of the Greek mythological character Circe to being seduced by women with breasts like 'bouncy castles'. Then there's someone on her roof 'taking syrup'. It's like a three-minute Jan Švankmajer film – in audio."

Meanwhile, Dean is fascinated by the dream of musician Micky "Milky" Graham. "It could be a scene from *Un Chien Andalou*," he says. "But instead of Salvador Dali dragging around a dead donkey, we have Micky strolling along, talking to the baby elephant under his arm..."

Elsewhere, Frances Castle is celebrating the 10th anniversary of her sublime Clay Pipe label with reissues of its first two releases. Her own album *The Fields Lie Sleeping Underneath*, recorded as The Hardy Tree, is a wistful exploration of London's "past beneath the pavements". And *Thalassing*, by Michael Tanner and Kerrie Robinson, is a folky, improvised evocation of the dark beauty of the coastline. Both are available from [claypipemusic.co.uk](http://claypipemusic.co.uk). And on Ghost Box Records, Portuguese psych outfit Beautify Junkyards follow up their excellent *Cosmorama* album with a 7" single recorded with label co-founder Jim Jupp, in his Belbury Poly guise. Available in March, it's a cover of the Incredible String Band's 'Painting Box'. Further spring releases include a vinyl edition of the excellent 2020 compilation album *Intermission*, and a new album from German experimentalists ToiToiToi. Visit [ghostbox.co.uk](http://ghostbox.co.uk) for more details.

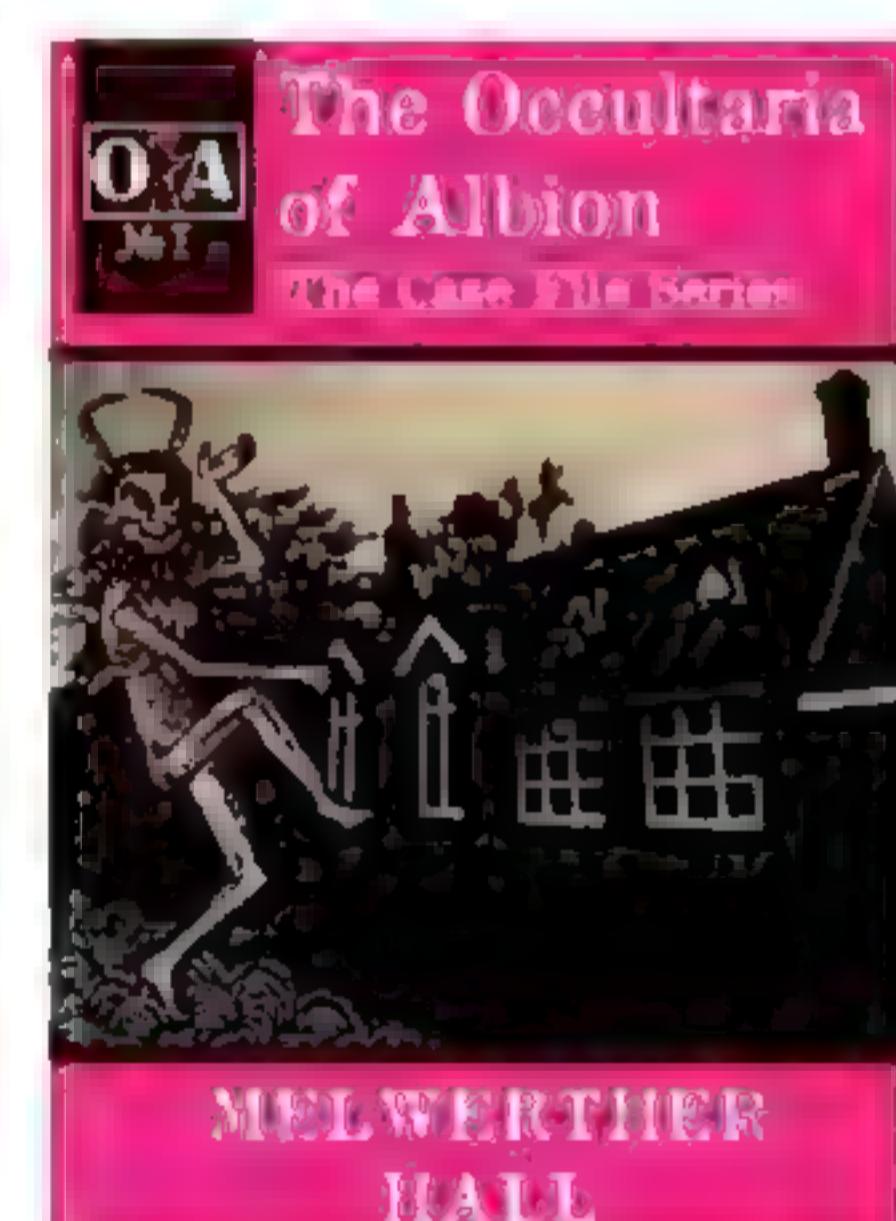
This exploration of the haunted æsthetic by artists with a background that transcends the stereotypical 1970s British upbringing continues to fascinate. Mat Handley's Woodford Halse label, based in cosmopolitan South Yorkshire, boasts two excellent new releases by international artists. Firefay's album *Tales of Monsters and Fairies* is a collection of artfully arranged supernatural ballads, all sung by multi-lingual French chanteuse Carole Bulewski. Meanwhile, in the States, Virginia-based Personal Bandana have recorded *This Time It's...*, an album of vintage Casio synths that evokes fuzzy memories of crackly, early 1980s



PBS science documentaries. Both albums are available from [woodfordhalse.bandcamp.com](http://woodfordhalse.bandcamp.com).

And what do you know? You wait a lifetime for an album about the 1977 "Dyfed Triangle" spate of Welsh UFO sightings, then two come along at once. Hot on the heels of The Night Monitor's *Spacemen Mystery of the Terror Triangle* (FT400:66-67) comes an unconnected new album by Spurious Transients. *Something Strange Came Out of The Skies* is the brainchild of musician and writer Gavin Lloyd Wilson, whose sister Belinda had her own 1977 UFO encounter in the same vicinity. And it's a very different album: a collection of dramatic spoken word pieces accompanied by delicious drones and even the odd sitar. Sadly, Belinda herself died shortly after recording pivotal track 'Mystery Object Over Llangwym', an affecting account of her own experience, and the album is both a fascinating document of the phenomenon and a touching tribute to her memory. Visit [spurioustransients.bandcamp.com](http://spurioustransients.bandcamp.com).

Turning to matters literary, Lincolnshire-based Richard Daniels and his partner-in-strangeness Melody Clark are the shadowy powers behind *The Occultaria of Albion*, a series of glossy zines spoofing the paranormal partwork magazines of the 1980s and 1990s. Imagine Vivian Stanshall editing *The Unexplained*. There have been eight issues so far, but the first seven worked backwards, so the last of them to be released was Issue 1. Keeping up at the back, there? Each edition explores the supernatural links of a specific location, and the first (i.e.



seventh) covers "Melwerther Hall", located – obviously – in the East Midlands market town of Hexhorn.

The series affectionately sends up the arcane tangles of traditional British weirdness. Melwerther Hall, it seems, is linked to both the missing "Omnia Dæmonia" book compiled by King James I, and the strange experiences of

1980s children's TV favourite Sally Swift. I laughed at the account of Hexhorn District Youth Choir's recording of 'Jerusalem' being carried into deep space by the missing Prospero I probe, and had splendid fun examining the small print of the local adverts at the back. "Connie Crone's Exemplary School of Dance & Expressionist Movement: NO FLASHDANCE".

Issue 8, 'Cragsyke Bay', is out now, and features long-overdue credit for the sterling work of Frank Bourne, founder of the Lost Glove Society. Head to [www.plasticricharddaniels.com](http://www.plasticricharddaniels.com), or become a patron at [patreon.com/occultaria](http://patreon.com/occultaria). And to finish: a conundrum.

Lots of us have been delighting in the YouTube adventures of loveable pixie-hunter Erwin Saunders (see FT395:46-48), whose 17 short videos, uploaded between

LEFT: The mysterious image that features in the latest video from elusive pixie hunter Erwin Saunders.

September 2017 and July 2019, follow his quest to uncover the secrets of the "Morsu pixies". As Erwin bumbles around idyllic-looking woodland, fleetingly-glimpsed sprites scuttle teasingly around him. The videos are utterly charming, but the 17th instalment – uploaded on 10 July 2019 – showed a distracted and dispirited Erwin, and his subsequent radio silence made many wonder if the game was up.

Nevertheless, on 5 February 2021, an 18th video was finally uploaded to Erwin's channel. Teasingly entitled '???', it bears little relation to previous instalments: it's a static illustration of what appears to be a headstone covered in mystical symbols, with further runic figures visible in the stormy sky above. It's accompanied by 1 minute 56 seconds of mournful bagpipes, and – after 58 seconds – a breathy vocal joins in, but the lyrics are indecipherable. Those of a morbid disposition might be tempted to conclude the picture shows Erwin's final resting place, but the "ES" signature in the bottom right-hand corner of the drawing suggests otherwise.

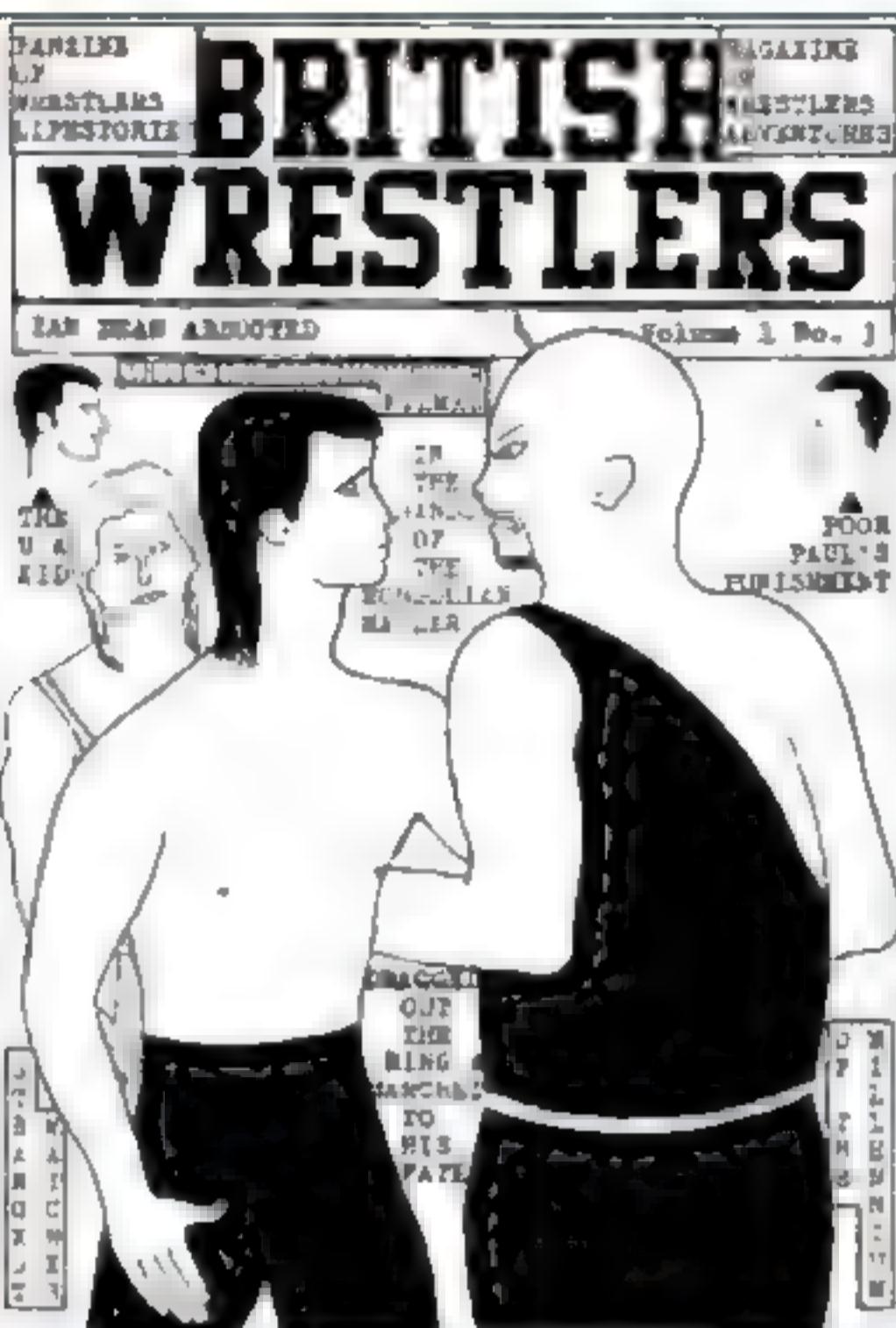
On further inspection, there are three fish on the ground at the foot of the headstone, and possibly a few Flying Saucer sweets. These, remember, are Erwin's pixie-bait of choice: as he sagely advised in the second video to be uploaded, "they go mad for the sherbet". I guess the riddle might be solved if anyone was actually capable of deciphering the symbols, but – given that I am frequently baffled by the Teatime Quickie Crossword – the task is probably best left to those with more finely-tuned minds than mine. The illustration is replicated here... send any suggestions via natterjack toad carriage to the usual address.

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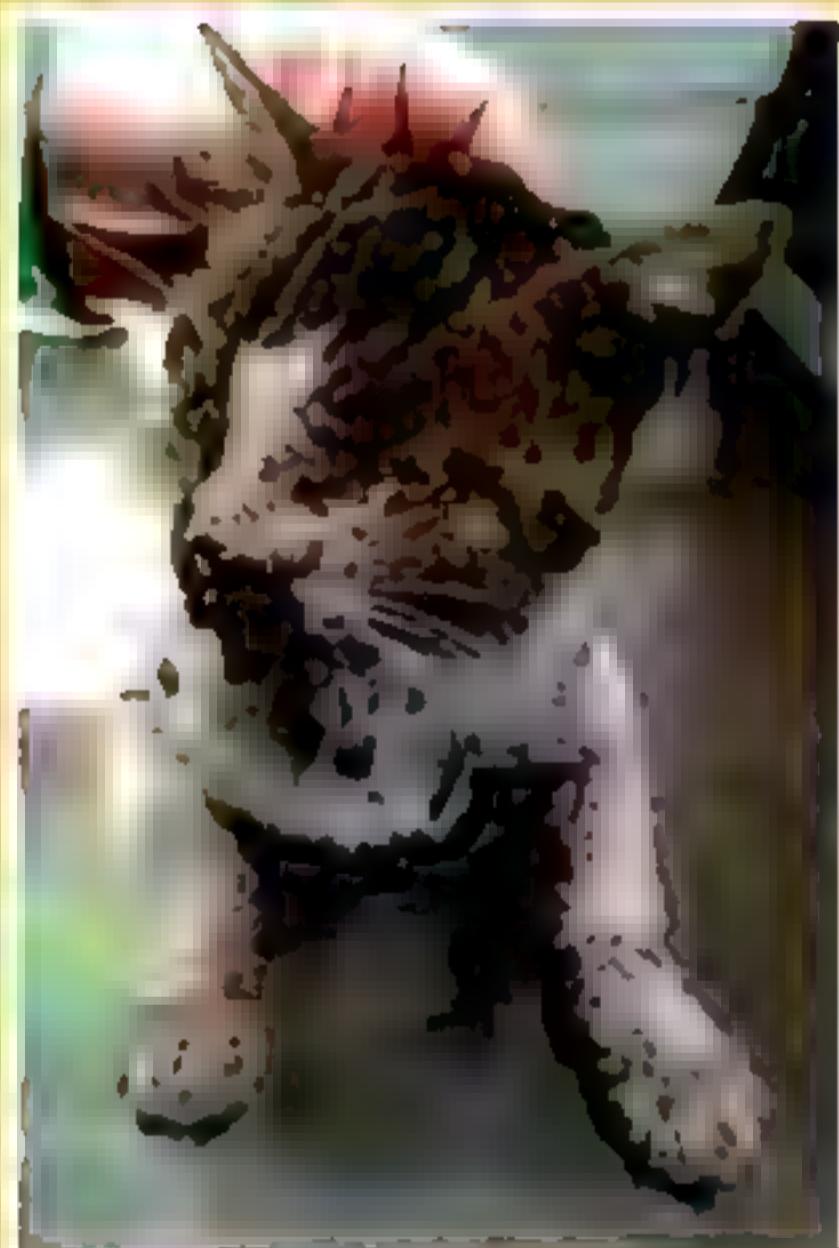
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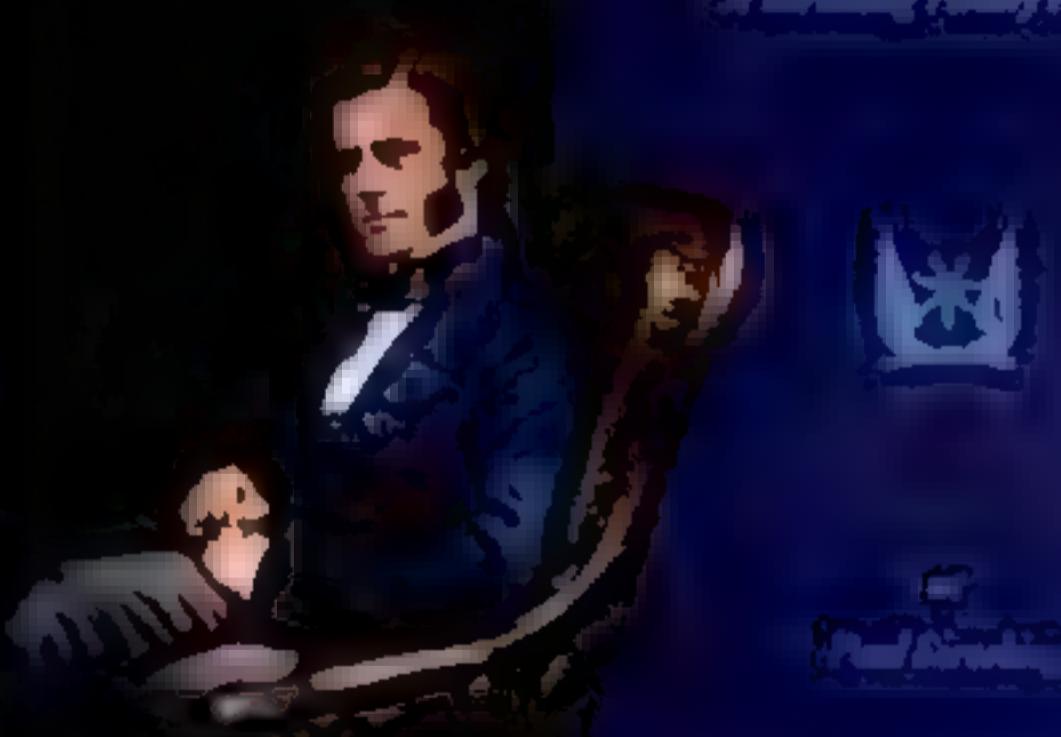
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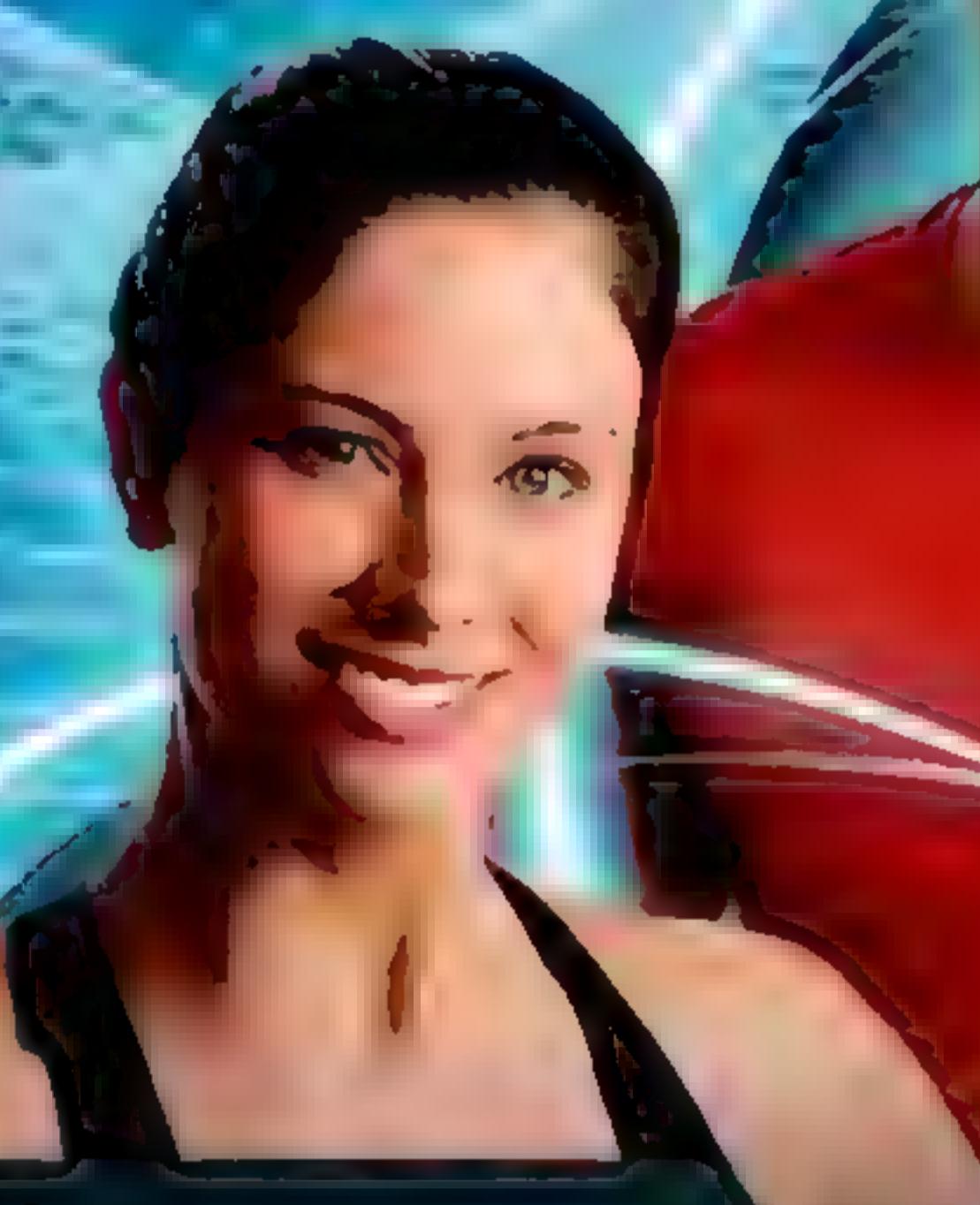
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Further details from Paul Sieveking at [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)  
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# LETTERS

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## African fish fall

I was quite surprised to find that the Bassa, a Bantu nation in Cameroon, reported the fall of marine creatures from the sky quite matter-of-factly. Georg Schürle (1870-1909), a German missionary, took down this statement from them: "Above the vault of heaven is a great sea, from which the rain comes. Above the sea live the tailed *bod ba ngi*. If one of them behaves impudently, it is thrown into the celestial sea, from which on occasion one has already fallen down to us, just as crabs and fish fall down to us more often from the celestial sea." (Source: G Schürle, *Die Sprache der Basa in Kamerun; Grammatik und Wörterbuch*, Hamburg, 1912, p.43) The Bassa live along the country's Atlantic coast. What might the tailed creatures be? Perusal of the dictionary enclosed in the book suggests that the designation simply means 'sky people', though a Bantuist may like to confirm this. Could this be a cryptozoological variation on the fortean staple of fish falls?

Marinus van der Sluijs  
Vancouver, Canada

## Welcome note

I have been a loyal subscriber for 30 years (half my life!) and still look forward to every issue. As a biologist, I am particularly keen on cryptozoology and the archaeology posts. For many years, I forwarded my already-read issues to my father, who loved, saved and re-read each issue. He loved the "weird science stuff". This week would have been his 87th birthday and I suspect that he's in the great fortean Beyond enjoying the issues that have yet to be written.

Cynthia Sinsel  
Newport Beach, California

## Nelson sightsees

I enjoyed "The Peril of Moving Statues" [FT398:32-39], but I was surprised Alan Murdie didn't discuss the eerie affair of "Forog", as documented on BBC radio on the 21 Dec 1954 instalment of The Goon Show. The noted "ama-

## SIMULACRA CORNER



James Watson found this curious butterfly online. Called 'Annie's 88' or *Diaethria anna*, its political affiliation might be misconstrued. (Neo-Nazis use the number 88 as an abbreviation for the Nazi salute Heil Hitler. The letter H is eighth in the alphabet, whereby 88 becomes HH.)

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.*

teur scientist" Neddie Seagoon is charged by the government to find a way to rid London of fog. This project alarms the statues of London, since, as their spokesman Lord Nelson explains, really foggy weather is the "only chance we statues have to move around and see the sights". When Neddie refuses to back down and temporarily manages to eliminate the fog, the statues import even darker and heavier foreign fog (forog) to blanket the city in its place. It all ends rather confusingly, but since it all began and continued rather confusingly as well, that seems appropriate.

Dennis Lien  
(Proud Hern member of The Goon Show Preservation Society) Minneapolis, Minnesota

## Ignorance of the law

"The victim who refuses to press charges" [Mythconceptions, FT402:25] comes up regularly on

TV and in conversation. Legally it is, of course, nonsense but even police use the expression from time to time, presumably in cases where an alleged victim simply will not testify against an accused. In a Scottish court in 2017 a case of violent assault had to be dropped when the victims "couldn't remember" the crime, even though one of them had had his ear ripped off. Proof positive, M'Lord, that it is the Crown that does the prosecuting, naively assuming perhaps that fear of the judicial process outweighs fear of a violent attacker.

Bob Johnston  
Glasgow

Mat Coward is not precise enough on the concept of "ignorance of the law". The maxim is of long-standing in the common law (in the Latin phrase *ignorantia legis excusat neminem*) and was intended to prevent defendants from claiming that they

did not know that they were breaking the law and so should be acquitted. This was, of course, in a time when there was much less law to be ignorant of. Apparently, the only occasion when it was successfully used to achieve an acquittal was in the case of a sailor who was at sea when the law in question was passed and so could not be expected to be aware of its introduction.

Where "ignorance of the law" is allowable in defence is not to avoid acquittal but in mitigation – that is, to reduce the punishment on the basis that the defendant acted in ignorance. Even this is strictly limited. Mat Coward's example of a taxpayer ignorant of tax regulations would not help a professional who would be expected to keep up to date with the rules applying to his profession.

Which brings me naturally to the other classic formulation: "Ignorance of the law does not prevent the losing lawyer from collecting his fee."

Martin Jenkins  
London

## Splitting hares

Pedantic I know, but in the last archaeology column [FT402:13] there's a reference to hares being introduced to Britain sometime between the fifth and third centuries BC. The Mountain Hare is native to Britain, while the Brown Hare was introduced.

Anne Keane  
Edinburgh

## Anti-vax nonsense

The spate of bizarre and downright dangerous misconceptions about the Covid vaccines supposedly altering a person's DNA, turning them into chimpanzees or causing them to grow a third leg are actually nothing new. When Edward Jenner pioneered the smallpox vaccine in the 18th century by using the cowpox virus, it was widely believed that the vaccine would turn humans into cows – and the notion was subsequently ridiculed by *Punch* magazine.

Phil Brand  
London

# LETTERS

## Pagan roots denied

I was pleased to read Therese Taylor's excellent "Lords of Misrule" [FT400:48-51], but was disheartened to read: "In my view, the pagan element cannot be entirely dismissed. The role of the young male as a figure of dynamic fun, but also of poignant loss, is a continuation of the agenda of the fertility cults." The author is arguing against what almost all contemporary scholars take as a truism: that the vast majority of folk traditions are not repurposed pagan holidays but rather explicitly Christian practices and traditions. I find her statement disheartening because it suggests an ahistorical understanding of the expressivity of mediæval and early modern minds and implies that these practices must be seen entirely as the product of their quasi-religious context. A much broader view is to assume that the various practices are devised in response to universal impulses in the human psyche that emerge regardless of social context. Too much writing has been wasted trying to scry the origins of individual traditions and too little dedicated to the question of why these traditions arise and their expression of universal impulses in the human mind.

**Jarett Kobek**  
Los Angeles

## Wandering church

Thanks to Rob Gandy for recognising Lincolnshire's rich fortean potential [FT401:32-38] – though as one of my relatives uncharitably remarked, the true horror of Ruskington is surely having to live there (inter-village rivalry clearly runs deep). I am also grateful to Edward Parnell for pointing the way to Lincolnshire and the Fens – among other haunted landscapes – in his excellent *Ghostland* (2019). Aside from Lincolnshire's magnificent fenland and coastal vistas ("where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet" in Larkin's famous line), the county is steeped in history and tradition. It was a great place in which to grow up in the 1970s and 1980s, where



## Trippy

Here is one of my paintings, called "Guest and Ghost from the First Stone to the Sag and Fall of the Roof", on show last January in an on-line exhibition at the Open Eye Gallery in Edinburgh. It's a large oil painting set inside the interior of the Dwarfie Stane on the island of Hoy in Orkney. Only about a year after I completed it in 1989, someone told me that a man who had retired to Orkney used to sit inside the cave wearing robes identical to the ones I portrayed here. He had been stationed in Persia as part of our overseas intelligence corps during the Victorian era. During the painting's initial exhibition in the Compass Gallery in Glasgow, a lady spent an hour staring at it. She was a former employee of the Sandoz company in Switzerland and said looking at it gave her the exact same feeling as she had in their early Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) experiments.

**Prof Ian Charles Scott** New York

school bookshelves were dominated by the likes of Alan Garner, John Masefield, John Gordon, Susan Cooper, E Nesbit, and Lucy Boston; most villages had a "grey lady" or two; May fairs, harvest festivals and bonfire nights were magical events but also rather sinister; and there was plenty of wild and sometimes rather bleak countryside to roam about in.

• After reading Alan Murdie's brilliant feature on moving stat-

ues [FT398:32-39], I would like to draw attention to a Lincolnshire example on a larger scale – a church that moved in the village of Dorrington. This was a well-known story when I was at school. Janet and Colin Bord included it in their *Atlas of Magical Britain* (1990, p.130).

The church of St James and St John occupies a hilltop position, especially striking when approaching the village from

the north, but the (local) legend goes that the Devil moved it there during its construction. Of course, it is difficult to get to the root of this story, but something strange must have happened, as the church was intended for the village rather than the hilltop, but the efforts of the builders in the village were stymied, night after night, when their materials and initial efforts at building were repeatedly moved uphill by some unseen force. Whether diabolic or not, it also eluded the frustrated builders' attempts to keep watch at night.

Eventually the builders gave up their attempts to construct the church in the village and hence the hilltop became its location. There was no more trouble after that, but folktales about the church remain to this day – running widdershins around the church at midnight is not advised. Incidentally, Dorrington's southerly neighbour is dear old Ruskington, so living in the latter village must have its compensations, not the least of which is surely that it is some sort of fortean hotspot.

**Andrew Mitchell**  
Bourne, Lincolnshire

## Animal ghosts, daft records

Regarding Animal Ghosts [FT402:69], it may just be that, like human ghosts, they haunt the locations where they lived. As cats and dogs, and to some extent horses, live in a domestic environment, their ghosts would be more likely to be witnessed by us humans. Perhaps the ghosts of cows and sheep appear in the fields overnight, and foxes and badgers haunt the woods, but no one is there to witness them.

• The review of the book *Grave Disturbances* [FT402:60] brought to mind something I have often thought about. Why is it OK to dig up people's remains after a certain (unspecified) time? We may be doing it to gain knowledge of the past, and stock up our museums, but have we any more right than the grave robbers who looted tombs for material gain?



• Turkmenistan is not top of my list of post-lockdown destinations. However, I think 'The Terrible Turkmen' [FT402:50-53] does the country an injustice in terms of the world records their leader is attempting to set. In recent years, the entries in *Guinness World Records* have become increasingly "obscure and absurdly specific", such as most ping pong balls caught with chopsticks in one minute, and most potatoes sliced in one minute (wait for it) while hopping on a shovel – 32 and 38 respectively, in case you're wondering. That makes Turkmenistan's effort seem positively pedestrian.

**Dave Miles**  
By email

## Appropriated symbols

The report 'Who is the Q Shaman?' [FT402:4] states: "While the Norse neopagan symbols with which Chansley is tattooed might suggest an affinity with neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups..." However, the vast majority of people wearing those symbols are not neo-Nazis. In fact, when the Q Shaman first became the poster boy for the Capitol Riots, the Pagan Federation and various Norse-inspired pagan groups – who self-identify under titles such as Asatru, Heathen, Viking way or northern path – immediately issued statements strongly condemning the Q Shaman's racism and appropriation of their sacred symbols.

**Derek Starkswood**  
Cambridge

## Lido leg-pull

As a member of the South London Swimming Club (SLSC) I find several things in the account of a faceless figure in black at the Tooting Bec Lido in south London problematic (Lido haunting?" by Phil Brand, FT401:72).

Tooting Bec lido is famously not heated; in fact it's the largest unheated pool in the UK. If the events took place in October 2020 as stated, then Mr Brand's partner cannot have completed "a few

lengths"; since the pandemic the Lido has been strictly controlled to meet Covid restrictions and only width swimming is permitted. Further, due to the same restrictions, entry is restricted to timed sessions of 45 minutes, which must be booked in advance and are carefully controlled at the entrance.

October is regarded as 'Winter Swimming' at the Lido. Only club members can swim and certainly should never be in the cold water for extended period of time. Two hours, as quoted, would be incredibly dangerous. The rule of thumb is one minute in the water per degree – so if the water was at average October temperature – which, in England, doesn't exceed 15 degrees – then anyone in the water for more than 15 minutes

would quickly attract the attention of the lifeguards.

**Emma J Fleming**  
London

*Asked to respond, Phil Brand replied: "I am so sorry. My partner needs to grow up. She has just admitted that she made it up as a prank to make me look like a bloody fool. It looks like she has succeeded."*

## Tearing basil

In *Mythconceptions* [FT397:23] we are invited to clarify whether tearing basil leaves genuinely releases flavour, or if chefs are just being "all poncey". I do not have the kind of time or energy to undertake such an investigation into the ponceyness or otherwise

of our nation's chefs. Just how do you propose I scale such behaviour? I think this is one of those cases where a little mystery is a good thing.

**James Wright**  
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

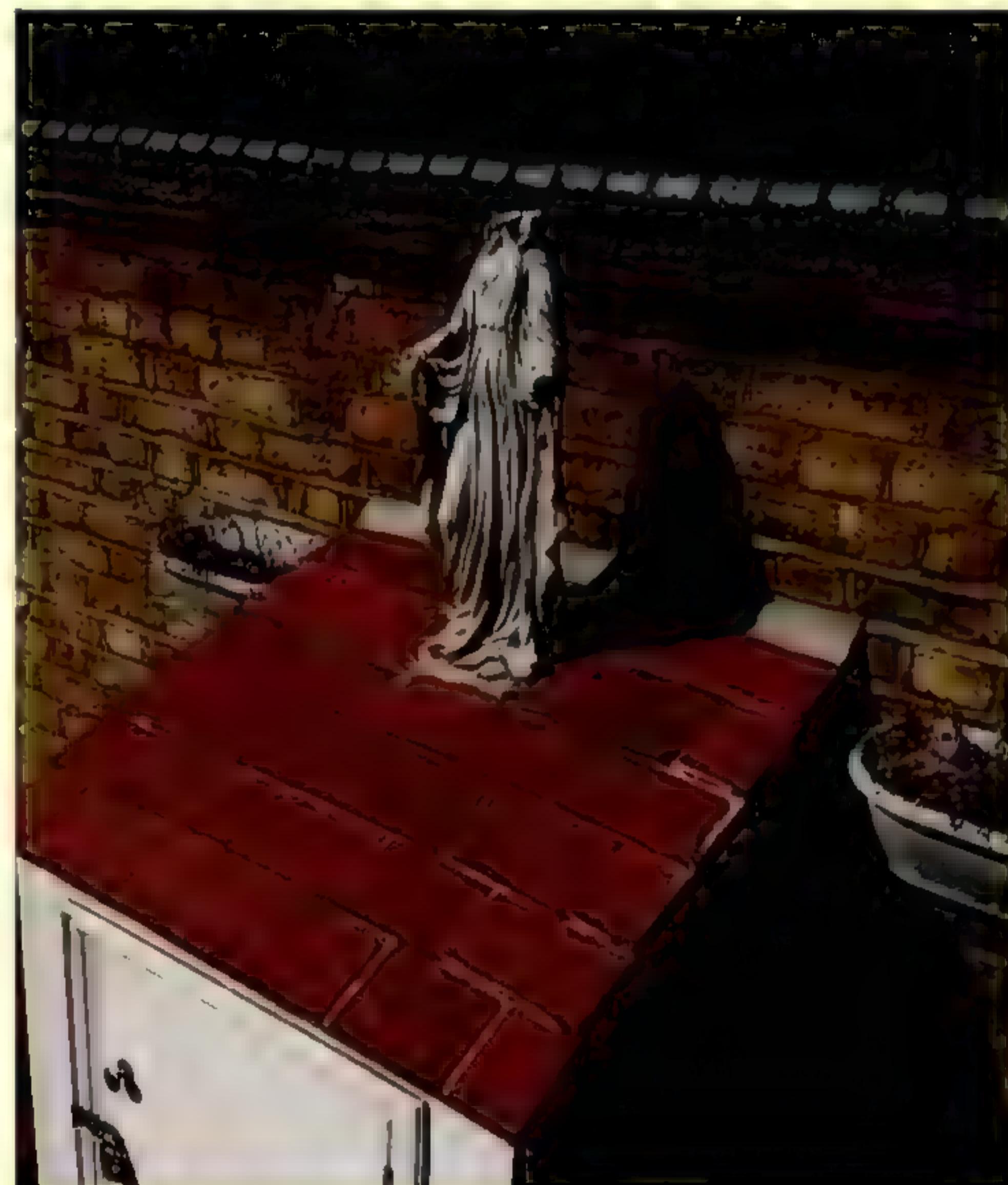
## Doppelgängers

Martin Downham said he saw his brother's family, in their car, arrive on his drive 10 minutes before they actually did [FT401:74]. In my book *Our Holographic World* (2014), I cited some 60 similar cases. I mentioned the *vardøgr* (*vardoeger*) phenomenon where someone appears to arrive before he actually does, but I emphasised the more important concept of *doppelgängers*. You meet an old friend in the street, you chat to him/her, and (s)he later denies all knowledge of the event, being at home at the time.

I tried to relate this to hologram theory, time slips, and the possibility of ghosts taking on the 'full-bodied apparition' of real people. This living ghost can be displaced from its proper time, being partly in and partly out of its surroundings. Only later does (s)he become 'real'. This is related to quantum physics, where particles remain in an improbable state of reality until they are 'decohered'. The quadrillions of atoms that go to make up the real human being are effectively in this state of improbability, in a kind of real and non-real overlap, so the living ghost remains as some kind of image until it is 'decohered'.

Joan Forman, who wrote a book about time mysteries, suggests there is a kind of psychic or emotional interaction between the observer and the physics of the warp itself; the scene suddenly changes because you have just looked out of the window. Larry Flaxman and Marie D Jones, in *The Déjà vu Enigma* (2010), say people can become 'entangled' via some unknown result of emotional bonding, while continuing to influence each other and their reality over vast distances.

**Antony Milne**  
London



## Walthamstow Madonna

I was interested to read of the recent appearance of "Our Lady of the Lay-by" in Ansbach, Bavaria [FT401:26]. I spotted this Headless Madonna in July 2020 on a little shrine at the entrance to St Mary Road, Walthamstow, east London, right next to Walthamstow Central. I think the 'shrine' might actually be some sort of municipal lock-up for a dustbin or housing for a meter or something.

**Matt Salusbury** London

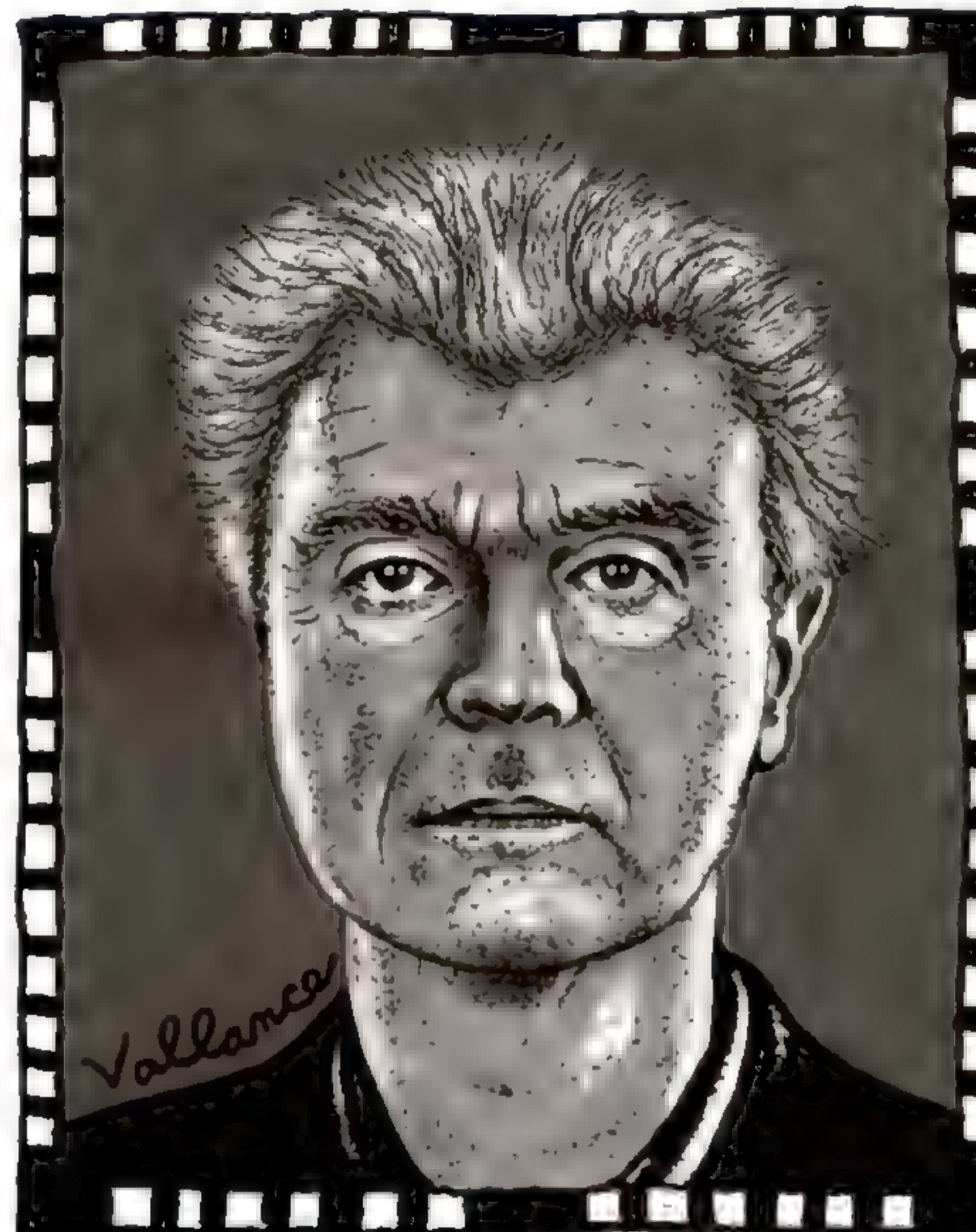
# It Happened to Me...

## The Quantum Prank

Some time ago, I had an exhibition in New York at the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery. After openings, the gallery often hosts a dinner for the artist, and they asked me whom I would like to invite. The only person that I could think of was David Byrne (of Talking Heads fame). Over the years he has attended several of my art exhibits, and I have talked with him at various art events. The scene goes like this: after the art opening, the gallery staff and various art luminaries head over to a café, not far from the gallery. The gallery has reserved the entire back room at the trendy establishment. One by one we file in and take our seats, and soon the entire back room is completely full except for one table.

After talking to the guests for a few minutes, my wife, artist Victoria Reynolds, notices that the last table is now occupied – and she recognises the back of David Byrne's head by his coiffed shock of white hair. We're happy to see artist Cindy Sherman is seated with him (and she seems to notice they've been spotted). I thank the gallery assistant for contacting Mr Byrne with the dinner invitation. With a perplexed expression she says, "That's odd. No, we never reached David Byrne. We couldn't find his address." David Byrne had wandered into this café on the night of the opening at the correct time and found the only available table in our group – and he never received an invitation. What are the chances? What if I had non-invited Mick Jagger – would he arrive at the appropriate moment and take the only remaining table in the room? What about Jack Nicholson or Lady Gaga – would they arrive like clockwork?

This had to be more than a coincidence so I came up with a theory of synchronicity called The Quantum Prank. The theory presupposes that



*David Byrne had wandered into this café on the night of the opening...*

Jung's collective unconscious exists and that it is outside of time and space – akin to the Akashic Records where ideas and all knowledge commingle. I suggest that when we dream, our souls travel to that place to access information and interact with other souls on the same quest. Since this realm is outside of time, you and another soul can plan a future prank on yourselves. Like if I meet the soul of David Byrne, I could tell him about the dinner invitation. He could say, "But I will never receive the invitation. But hey, I'm going to show up anyway. Wouldn't that be funny? We will be so confused when it happens. Ha ha!" When the future date arrives, unconsciously

we carry out our plan that will seem to be an incredible coincidence to us, because we cannot remember planning it. WE JUST QUANTUM PRANKED OURSELVES! The quantum prank could account for extraordinary incidents of synchronicity.

**Jeffrey Vallance**  
Canoga Park, California

## Faceless Figure

I am a police officer working 12-hour shifts, and on my early shifts I get up at 5.30am. In the third week of December 2019, I was driving my usual route to work basking in the glow of pre-leave euphoria as Christmas approached. The morning was dark but clear and not unusually cold as my car windows were not misted up or frozen. I drive an old diesel car that takes a while to warm up and the following incident happened less than a mile from home.

As I approached the bus stop just after Stourbridge Glass Cone (Google code FRGV+56) on the main

road from Kingswinford to Stourbridge, I noted a lone cowled figure standing just up from the bus stop. The way it stood, inanimate, just didn't feel right. As I approached I passed within 8ft (2.4m) of this figure and looked straight at it through the nearside window. I was acutely disturbed by the black void of a cowled head and a feeling the figure was inhuman.

Traffic was very light and there were no other vehicles on the road. A pedestrian crossing and local business lighting makes this area extremely well lit and I am certain that if the figure had had a face I would have seen it. The whole incident lasted no more than 15-20 seconds and I carried on to work telling myself that I must have been mistaken somehow. During lockdown I read about faceless entities, something I was not aware of before. I can still feel the fight/flight instinct of the incident and I can only really relate the oddness to the 'uncanny valley' of lifelike robots that move like a human but seem to have no 'soul'.

**Andy [name on file]**  
Stourbridge, West Midlands

## Pool figure

I was struck by the account of a 'haunted' lido [FT401:72 – now exposed as fiction, see page 73], as I had a similar experience. In 2015 I was a science student writing my dissertation on the ethics of Nuclear Energy. I was on a break from university to run in the annual Inverness Half Marathon. However, the questions raised by my work were very much on my mind and I was finding it hard to switch off. On the morning of the race, the hotel breakfast room was crowded and I ended up sharing a table with another guest – by a weird coincidence my new companion turned out to be a nuclear engineer employed at a Scottish plant – no prizes for guessing our topic of conversation.

My half marathon was a success and that evening I went to the hotel spa for a swim and a steam to wind down and soothe my aching body. To my initial delight I had the place to myself, but the feeling of pleasure didn't last. Although I'd stayed in that hotel before and swum alone in the spa several times, this time I felt a strong sense of "staginess" as though a hidden audience was observing me attentively yet coldly.

I was swimming under water when some sense told me I needed to get out of the water at once. I surfaced to find a man standing by the side of the pool looking down at me. He was vivid enough that I was just about to speak to him when I realised that nothing made sense. My visitor was very tall and thin, dressed in an old-fashioned black suit and black hat. I was immediately reminded of the physicist Robert Oppenheimer – a vision quite in keeping with the theme of the day! I was only beginning to process all this when the figure disappeared. I didn't feel that he was expressly malevolent, but I had a sense that the environment was very, very strange and that it was not in my best interests to remain there. I returned to my room as quickly as I could and didn't feel safe until I was in bed with the TV on.

I have heard that nuclear installations can be prone to fortean phenomena, and I am aware of various (entertaining) theories that nuclear fission can open doors to other dimensions. Is it possible that my slightly obsessive focus on the subject did something similar?

**Therese Whitelock**

Bristol

*Editor's note: FT correspondents have described encounters with such 'shadow people'. For 10 first-hand accounts, see FT274:76 and FT335:72-73. See also 'They came from the shadows' by Nick Parkins, FT335:54-55.*

## Spooky path

I was amazed to read Mark Sidwells's account of seeing the Grim Reaper on the path between Brooklands technical college and the local railway

station [FT400:37]. In 1978 I was a teacher at that same college. I found the job hard, and on Thursday nights after work I went to the pub where a few of the other teachers gathered and complained about how terrible it was to be a teacher. I only ever stayed for a couple of drinks because I lived miles away, in north London, and had to take a couple of trains to get home.

One night as I was walking soberly along the path between the college and the station (the same path where Mark Sidwells had his experience, I think), I looked up and saw a long, bright, whitish thing moving slowly in the sky above the trees. It didn't look like a plane or a helicopter or weather balloon; if anything, it looked like a glowing airborne submarine. It was undoubtedly an unidentified flying object in the sense that it was an object, it was flying, and I definitely couldn't identify it. It was a strange sight but it wasn't at all scary or threatening. After a few moments it wasn't there anymore, and I continued on my way to the station. The event has stayed with me, and now I'm amazed – and pleased – to find that somebody else had a quite different but equally inexplicable experience on what appears to be the very same path.

**Geoff Nicholson**  
By email

## Black thing on the Med

In the summer of 1988 my wife and I and our two young daughters jetted off to Majorca for a short break in the coastal town of Santa Ponsa, which sits on a cove overlooking the Mediterranean. Our hotel was situated not in the town itself but further up the cove, which gave us a splendid view of the area. On our final night we settled down for a meal on our balcony. Later, with our daughters safely tucked up in bed, we had a few drinks and a natter. After a little while, a huge black oblong object appeared from nowhere, just beyond the cove. It was sharply defined from corner to corner and as black as the hobs of hell. Picture yourself in

a darkened cinema – suddenly the film rolls but it's projecting nothing but a widescreen black surface.

It was actually quite frightening. My wife was upset and rushed into our apartment. After a few minutes it suddenly disappeared. What on Earth was it? Over the years I've asked several people who have worked at sea if they have ever witnessed anything like it, but never had a satisfactory answer. I think one or two thought I was pulling their leg. Any ideas?

**Stephen Collier**  
Liverpool

## Walking the dog

Round about 2002, over a period of 18 months or so, I experienced a great number of coincidences or synchronicities, some of which involved long sequences of events with symbols, places and things turning up repeatedly in unexpected places or circumstances, while others were one-off occurrences. I got into the habit of keeping a record of everything until it reached the stage there was so much that writing it all down was taking up too much time. Eventually I felt I'd reached burnout with all the stuff going on and backed off, stopped writing it all down and the coincidences petered out, though they have never stopped completely.

I read a few of the more popular books around at the time about coincidence and one of them suggested that other people's synchronistic experiences are never as interesting as one's own. When I re-read some of those I recorded I could see that some of my coincidences weren't all that mind-blowing, but what did make me wonder if "something indeed was going on" was the sheer number of them and the fact that, contrary to an accepted definition of synchronicity – coincidences which are meaningful (and sometimes helpful) to the person experiencing them – most of mine were totally meaningless and often quite bizarre.

Two of my one-off incidents are as follows: at one time I worked in an office overlooking Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow city centre and in

those days I took my dog to work with me. One day around 11.30am I was in my room as usual when I suddenly smelt tomato soup. I knew it was only my imagination, as there was no soup anywhere around, but it was as if the smell of tomato soup had been somehow triggered in my brain and I could actually smell it.

About an hour later I took the dog out as usual at lunchtime – across the road and up a side street on a very steep hill. About halfway up on the pavement was a large, spilled carton of tomato soup. This could be put down to a premonition rather than a synchronicity, but the following coincidence can less easily be explained that way.

Again, I was in my office and around 11 or 11.30am a work colleague came in to show me photographs of her son's wedding that had taken place in Mexico. One of the customs at a Mexican marriage is that the bride and groom have their handprints taken, made in the same way as fingerprints, but of the whole hand. She showed me photographs of the couple having the prints made and of the prints themselves. Later, around 12.30, I took the dog out, up the same side street as usual and lying in the gutter was a card – like a small playing card and bigger than a business card. On the uppermost side of it was a handprint. I turned the card over and found it was advertising a nightclub in the area.

It occurred to me some time ago that I might write to *Fortean Times* with some of my coincidence experiences, but never got round to it. I write to you now because of what followed shortly after I read the letters headed "star jelly" and "Nose pad windfall" [FT396:68, 70]. I took the dog for a walk in the hills, our first time up there for over a year and on a not much-frequented path. Halfway up the hill I found some "star jelly". As far as I can recall I have only once before come across this substance and that was in the Lake District fells a number of years ago. Further up the path, I found a pair of sunglasses.

**Cat Fleming**  
By email

# PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past relates the tragic tale of a group of escaped big cats on the loose in a German city



## 14. A LEIPZIG LION HUNT



ABOVE: An unposted card showing the escape of the lions, the attempt to pacify them by hosing them down, and the final carnage.

In October 1913, Barnum & Bailey's Circus was playing in Leipzig, Germany. On the evening of 19 October, some of the circus animals were transported through town on two large horse-drawn wagons. The driver of one of these, containing eight lions and a tiger, had stopped to get some beer at a tavern before the journey continued through the busy streets. Suddenly, the horses stopped in the Blücher-Strasse just as the wagon was on the tram tracks, and the driver was unable to get them moving again. The tram hit the wagon, and the nine animals inside were able to escape.

There was a thick fog in

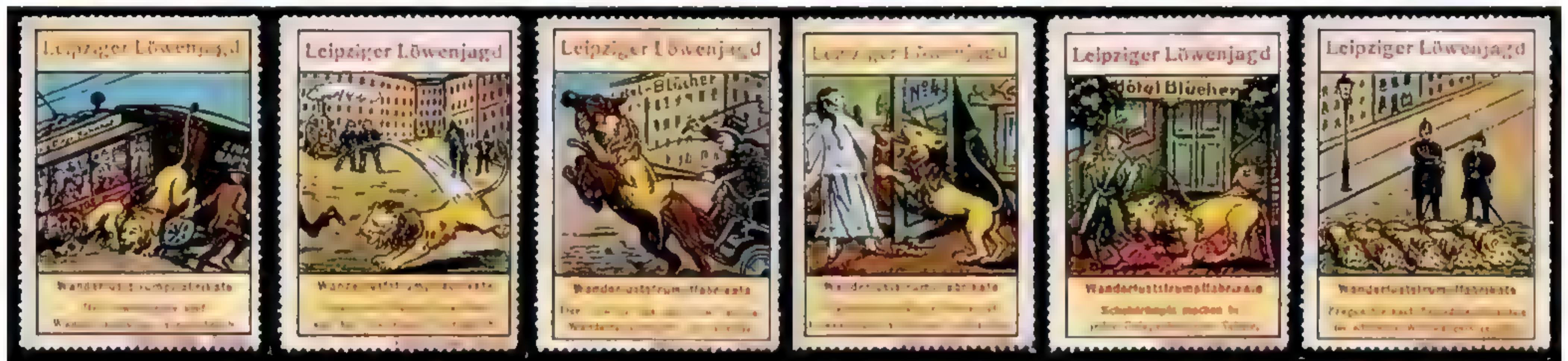
Leipzig that night, and as soon as people realised that nine big cats were loose, they panicked and stampeded into shops and restaurants to take refuge. Whereas the tiger appears to have been a timid animal and did not venture out into the streets, all eight lions ran about in the Blücher-Strasse and frightened people. One of them attacked a horse, but the circus employees managed to dissuade it from savaging the poor harnessed equine.

On hearing that lions were on the rampage in Leipzig, the fire brigade was mobilised, as was a troop of 60 armed constables. The firemen applied their hoses and the constables loaded their

revolvers. Unnerved by the powerful jets of water, two of the lions ran into the Hotel Blücher, bounding up the main staircase and scattering the guests in all directions. A lioness scratched on the door of a hotel room, and its inhabitant, a Frenchman, was nearly frightened to death when he perceived the nature of his late-night visitor. A brave hotel waiter opened the door of another room and decoyed the lioness into the lavatory, where she was safely locked up. The other lion ran all the way up to the hotel attic, where it was later recaptured by the circus employees using a large net.

The other six lions made a stand in the street, but the fire-

power of the police constables was too much for them: they all perished miserably in the fusillade of bullets. No human being was harmed in this leonine escapade, and the injured horse recovered from its wounds. The wagon driver was fined 25 marks for his carelessness, and the circus director was fined 100 marks for his indifferent approach to security. The escaped lions, valued at 30,000 marks (£5,000), were exhibited before the curious at Leipzig Zoo. Although offers to purchase beefsteaks cut from the gunned-down animals were turned down, the restaurant 'Auerbachs Keller' boasted a special menu,



TOP LEFT: A tasteless 'funny' card, posted in 1913, contrasting the valour of German soldiers of old with the numerical advantage enjoyed by the leocidal Leipzig constables. TOP RIGHT: A photographic postcard showing six dead lions and the keepers of Leipzig zoo. CENTRE: A series of advertising stamps for 'Wanderlust' stockings commemorating the lion hunt. ABOVE: Another card, stamped and posted in 1913, showing the Leipzig lion hunt.

containing lion's tail soup made from crocodile tears. There were several picture postcards showing the police constables posing with

the dead lions, as well as 'funny' postcards printed as mementoes of the lion hunt; the Germans clearly thought the wanton

destruction of six attractive and valuable animals quite amusing in 1913. Leipzig would remain lion-free until September 2016,

when two young lions escaped from the zoo, one of them being shot dead after a tranquilliser dart failed to slow it down.

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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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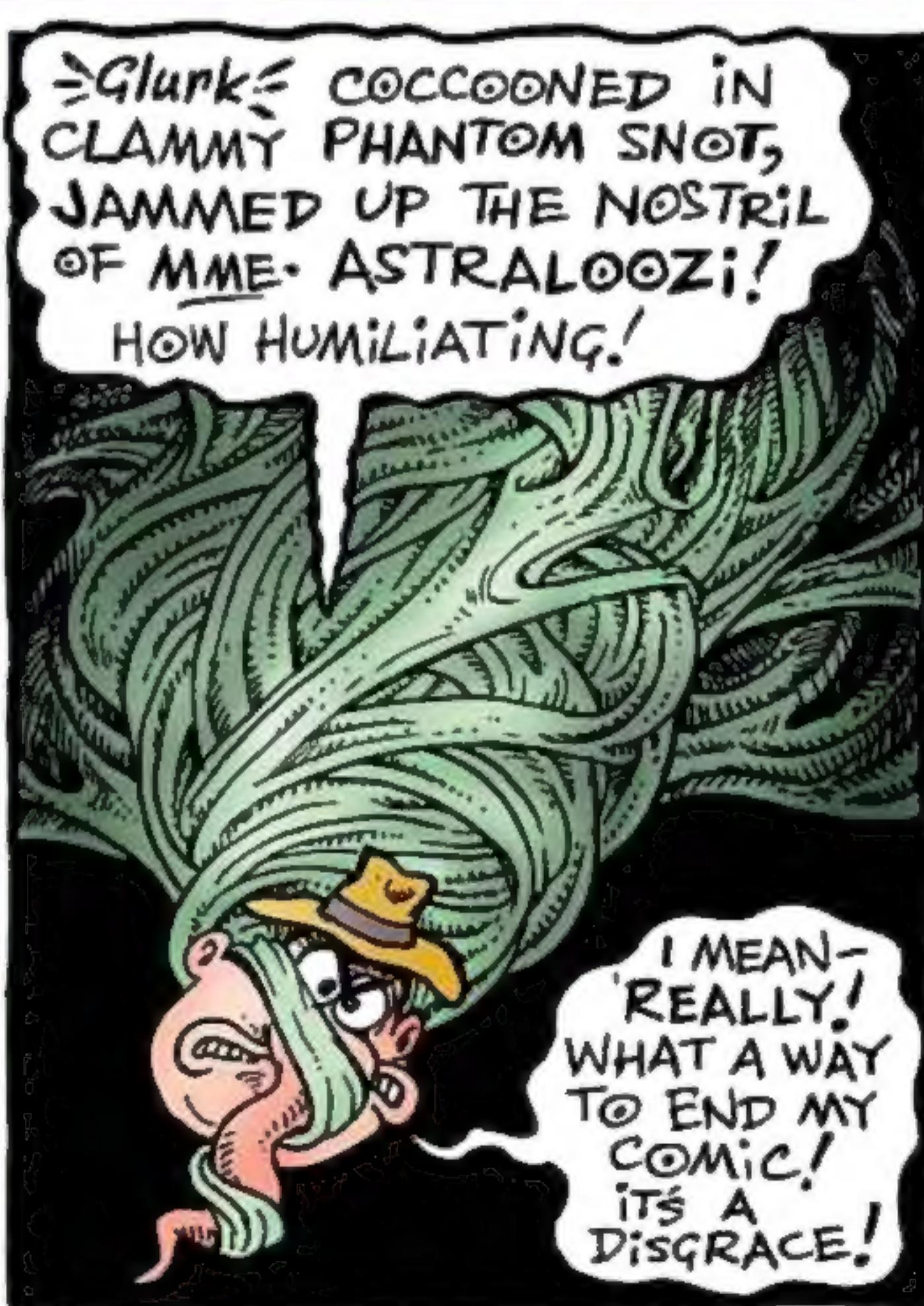
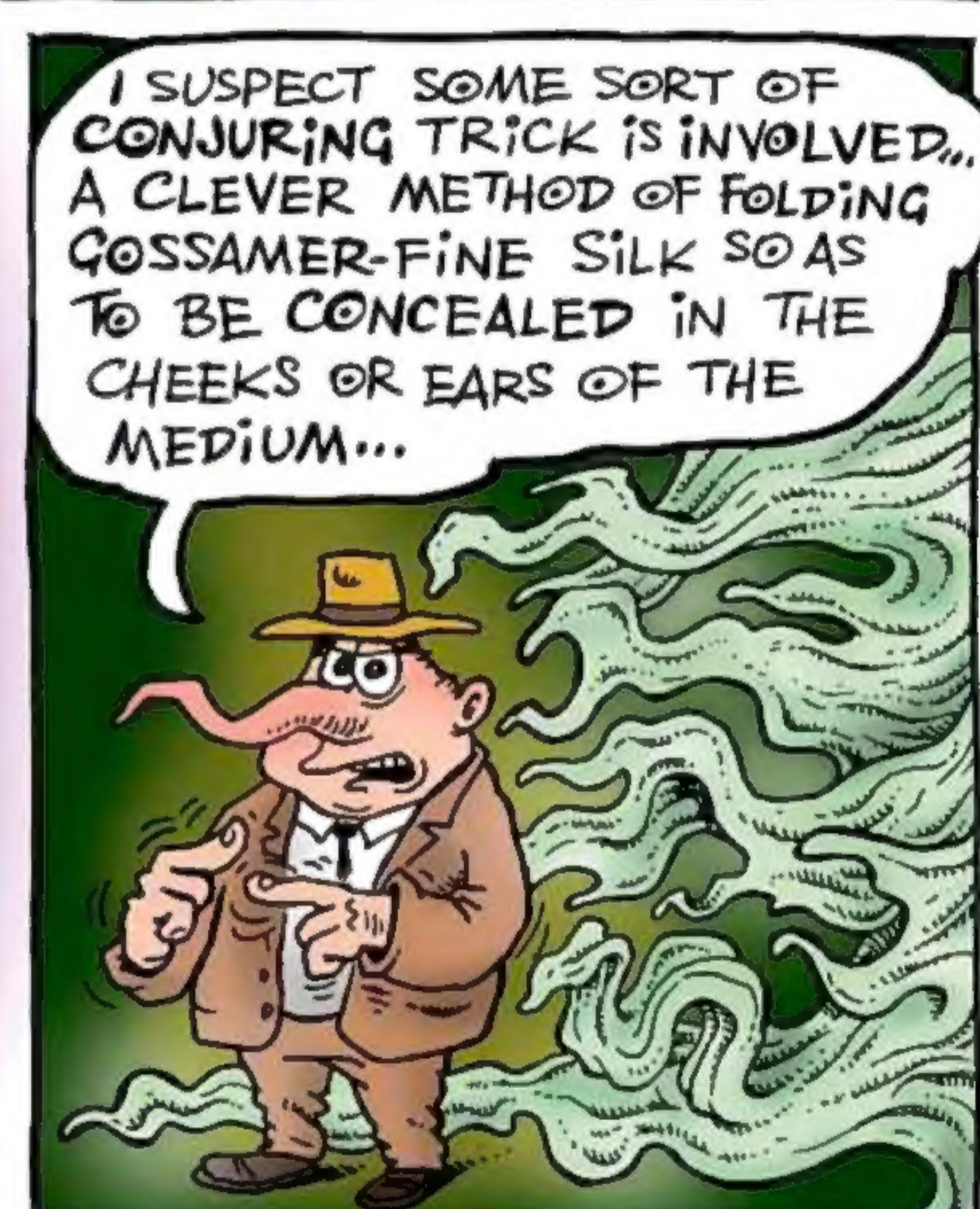
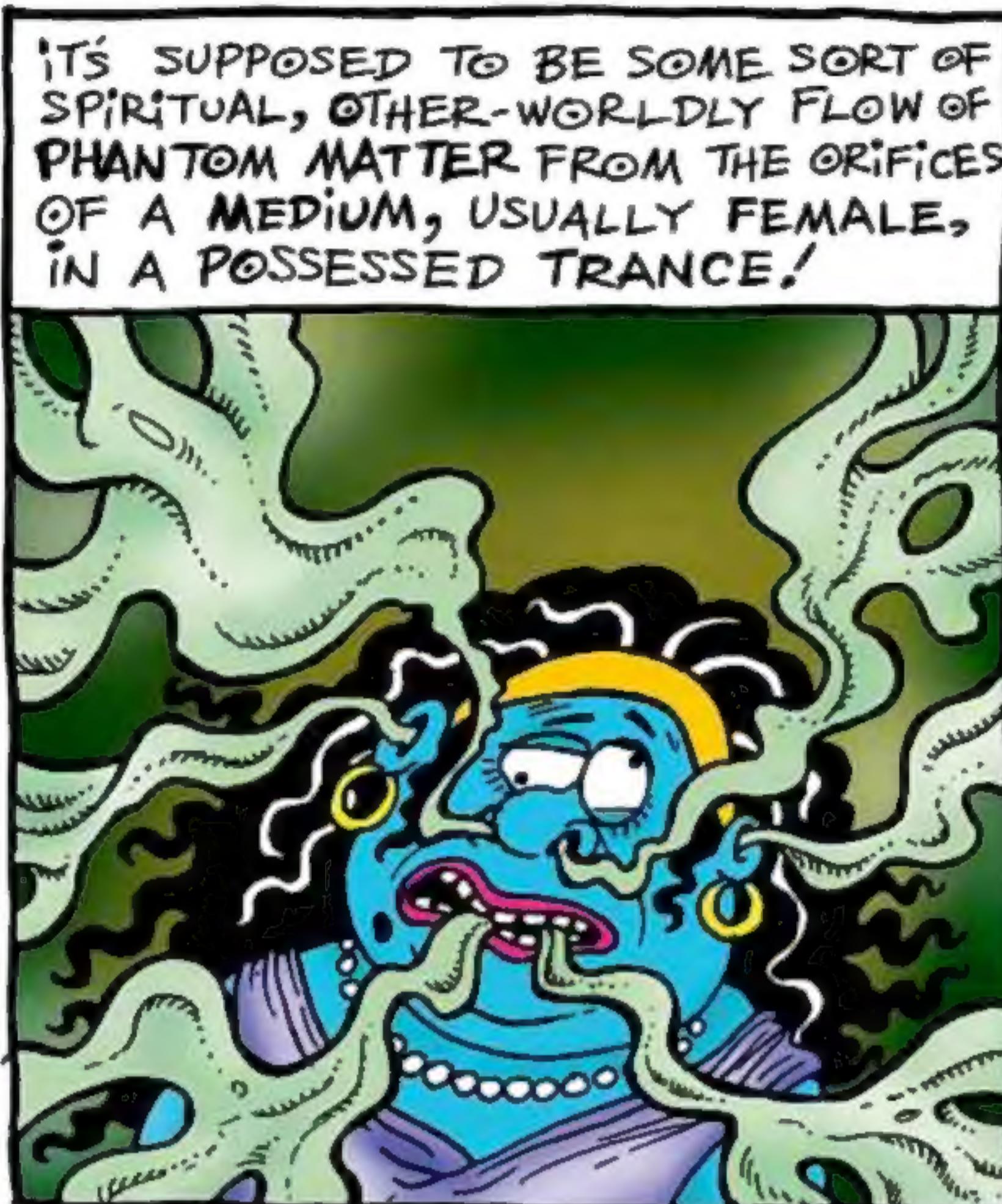
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# PHENOMENOMIX

ECTOPLASM

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# COMING NEXT MONTH



## LAKE MONSTER SAFARI HUNTING FOR LOCH MORAR'S 'MORAG' IN THE 1970S



## SHAMANS AND STONES ON THE TRACK OF BHUTAN'S ROCK-THROWING POLTERGEIST



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# FORTEAN TIMES 405

ON SALE 22 APR 2021

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A father was accidentally killed by his son during an outdoor game of 'slaps' at a pub, an inquest heard. Malcolm Callender, 48, often played the game with his 18-year-old son Ewan. Mr Callender, Bursar of the prestigious public school Wellington College and a former soldier, had delivered a "stinging" blow to his son and then stood with his hands behind his back saying: "Right, you can have your free shot." Witnesses described Ewan clenching his fists before giving his father a slap that sent him reeling backward into the road. As Mr Callender lay on the ground, his son was heard shouting: "Wake up dad. I love you." Although treated in hospital for an acute haemorrhage, Mr Callender died the next morning, with the cause of death given as "blunt force trauma to the head".

The teenager wiped away tears as he testified at the inquest, explaining how he had been reluctant to strike his more powerfully-built father, but had "wanted to make his dad proud". Malcolm Callender had served in the Royal Engineers for 27 years, attaining the rank of captain and later quartermaster. His son Ewan had attempted to follow in his father's footsteps and spent three years in the Army. His mother Catherine Morrison-Callender, herself an Army veteran, described how the family liked playing physical games: "We would wrestle with each other where we would try to grab the other person and take them to the ground." When Ewan reached the age of 15, he and his father began to slap each other around the face, Mrs Morrison-Callender explained. "Malcolm would always be winding him up, saying 'You reckon you can take me yet?'" She said her husband was very competitive and would never allow their son to win.

After his father's death Ewan was arrested, but 18 months later the Crown Prosecution Service declined to prosecute, deciding it would not be in the public interest. The coroner's verdict was one of accidental death as a result of "non-aggressive, not hostile consensual horseplay". *D.Mail, 9 Dec 2020.*

At least two people were stabbed to death on Hallowe'en night in Quebec by a man armed with a katana, the traditional single-edged Japanese sword used by samurai, and dressed in mediæval clothing. A witness said the swordsman "was in

black clothes, like a ninja". Five other people were wounded in the Saturday night attack, which occurred in the historic Old Quebec neighbourhood, and a man later identified as Carl Girouard, 24, was arrested shortly before 1am on Sunday morning.

An initial probe found the suspect to be unaffiliated with any extremist groups. Police believe the attack was premeditated, and in a press statement stated that Girouard, who lived in Montreal's suburbs, had come to Quebec City with "the intention of doing the most damage possible... everything leads us to believe he chose his victims at random." Girouard had apparently spoken of perpetrating such an attack "in a medical context" (whatever that means) five years ago, but was not known to police and had no criminal record. He was lying on the ground, barefoot and hypothermic, when he was arrested, giving himself up to the police without resistance. *BBC News, 1 Nov 2020.*

A hunting accident took place at the Duhallow hunt kennels in Co Cork, in which professional huntsman Ger Withers, a married man and father of three young children, was attacked and killed by a pet stag when he went to feed it. Mr Withers was well known in the area, and highly regarded as a skilled huntsman with Old English hounds. A police press statement said gardaí had attended the scene of a workplace accident in Liscarroll, Co. Cork, where a man in his 40s had received fatal injuries. *irishexaminer.com, 30 Dec 2020.*

Corey Sharpling, a keen dancer aged 21, was killed in a landslip on the A484 between Carmarthen and Cardigan in Wales just after he had stepped off a bus. The incident took place in October 2018 when Storm Callum had been causing high winds and heavy rain in the area. Mr Sharpling was on his way to his part-time job at Macdonalds in Carmarthen when a fallen tree prevented his bus from travelling any further. He alighted and was standing by the roadside watching rescue services as they attempted to clear the road when an entire embankment collapsed. The ensuing landslip swept both him and the lorry away, to be engulfed by debris composed of earth and trees. His body was later found near a river. *BBC News, 15 Oct 2018; 5 Feb 2021.*

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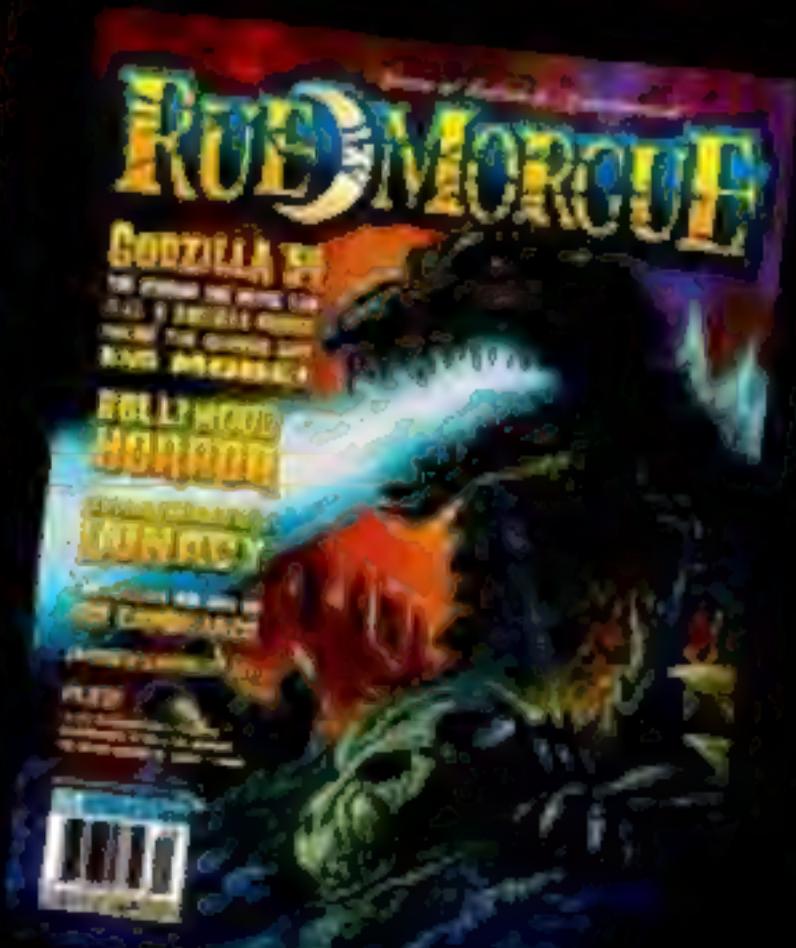
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